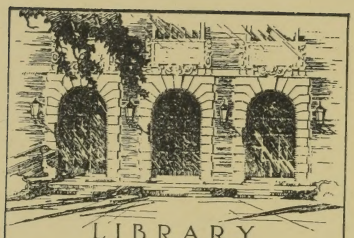

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MARRIED OR SINGLE?

BY

B. M. CROKER

AUTHOR OF

"DIANA BARRINGTON," "A FAMILY LIKENESS," ETC.

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MARRIED OR SINGLE?

CHAPTER XXIX.

"MR. WYNNE!"

A FEW days before their departure for the sunny south, Miss West, her father, and several visitors were sitting in the drawing-room, the tall shaded lamps were lit, the fragrant five-o'clock cup was being dispensed by Madeline; who was not, as Lady Rachel remarked, in her usual good spirits. Lady Rachel had thrown off her furs, she had secured a comfortable seat in a becoming light, and was flirting audaciously with a congenial spirit. Mrs. Leach was of course present,

and an elderly colonel, Mrs. Veryphast (a smart society matron), her sister, and a couple of Guardsmen—quite a gathering. Mrs. Veryphast was laughing uproariously, Mrs. Leach was solemnly comparing notes respecting dressmakers with Mrs. Veryphast's sister. The colonel, Mr. West, and Lord Tony, were discussing the share list. The Guardsmen were devoting themselves to the fair tea-maker, when the anteroom door was flung open with a flourish, and a footman announced "Mr. Wynne!"

This name was merely that of an ordinary visitor—one of the multitude who flocked to offer incense to his daughter, a partner and a slave, in fact, in the ears of every one save two—Lord Tony's, and Mrs. Wynne's. The latter felt as if she had been turned to stone.

Had Laurence come to make a scene? to claim her? She breathed hard, living a whole year of anxiety in a few seconds of time. The hand that held the sugar-tongs actually became rigid through fear. She glanced at her father. He, poor innocent individual, was totally unconscious of the crisis, and little supposed that the good-looking young fellow now shaking hands with Madeline was actually his son-in-law!

"Oh, how do you do?" faltered Miss West, and raising a swift, appealing, half-terrified look to the stranger. "Papa, let me introduce Mr. Wynne."

Mr. Wynne bowed, uttered a few commonplaces to the invalid, and stood talking to him for some time.

Meanwhile, Mr. West noticed with satisfaction the air of refinement and of blue blood (which he adored) in the

visitor's appearance and carriage. Wynne was a good name.

No one guessed at the situation, except Lord Tony. His breath was taken away, he looked, he gaped, he repeated the same thing four times over to Mrs. Veryphast—who began to think that this jovial little nobleman was a fool. To see Miss West thus calmly (it looked so at a distance) present her husband to her father, as he afterwards expressed it, "completely floored him." And the old chap, innocent as an infant, and Wynne as cool as a cucumber, as self-possessed as it was possible to be!

And then suddenly Lady Rachel turned round and saw him, and called out in her shrill, clear voice, "Why, Mr. Wynne, is it possible! who would have thought of seeing *you* here? Come over and sit

beside me," making room on the Chesterfield couch, "and amuse me."

"I'm afraid I'm not a very amusing person," he replied, accepting her beringed fingers, and standing before her.

"You can be, if you like; but perhaps you now reserve all your witty sayings for your stories. Are you writing anything at present?" (Stereotyped question to author.)

"No, not at present," rather stiffly.

"I did not know you knew the Wests. Maddie, dear," raising her voice, "you never told me that you and Mr. Wynne were acquaintances."

Madeline affected not to hear, and stooped to pick up the tea-cosy, and hide a face which had grown haggard; whilst Mr. West, who had gathered that Wynne was a rising man, and that his books were getting talked about, invited

him to come and sit near him, and tell him if there was anything going on—anything in the evening papers?

"You see, I'm still a bit of an invalid," indicating a walking-stick; "shaky on my pins, and not allowed to go to my club. I've had a very sharp attack, and I'm only waiting till the weather is a little milder to start for the south of France." He had taken quite a fancy to this Wynne (and he did not often fall in love at first sight).

Madeline looked on as she handed her husband a cup of tea, by her parent's orders, and was spellbound with amazement and trepidation to see Laurence and her father, seated side by side, amiably talking politics, both being, as it providentially happened, of the same party. This was to her almost as startling a spectacle as if an actual

miracle had been performed in the drawing-room before her eyes.

That her attention strayed in one particular direction did not escape Mrs. Leach's observation. Could this be—— But no, he was far too presentable, he was evidently one of the Wynnes of Rivals Wynne; she herself saw the strong family likeness. He was absolutely at his ease, he scarcely noticed Miss West, though she glanced repeatedly at him, was looking pale and agitated, talked extreme nonsense, and filled cups at random.

No, no; this man was *not* the mysterious friend. No such luck for Madeline; and, if he had been, he never could have had the nerve to walk boldly and alone into the very lion's den. But he probably knew the real Simon Pure, and was a go-between and messenger. Yes, that was it. Having thus disposed of her

question to her entire satisfaction, and carefully studied Mr. Wynne, from the parting of his hair to the buttons of his boots, she turned and exercised her fascinations on the colonel, who was one of her sworn admirers.

Lady Rachel, who had wearied of her companion, threw him off with an airy grace—which is one of the finest products of civilization—and, on pretence of having a little talk with Mr. West, cleverly managed to monopolize Mr. West's companion, chatting away most volubly—though now and then Mr. West, who was well on the road to recovery, insisted on having *his* say; and, as he discoursed, Laurence had leisure to take in the magnificence of his surroundings. The lofty rooms, silken hangings, velvet pile carpets, priceless old china, and wealth of exotic flowers. Everything

seemed to cry out in chorus, "Money! money! money! Money everywhere." Madeline, in a velvet gown, sitting in the midst of it, mistress of all she surveyed, with a young baronet on one side and a duke's heir on the other absolutely hanging on her words. Her beauty, in its setting of brilliant dress, soft light, and a thousand feminine surroundings, failed to impress him. It was for this—looking about, and taking in footmen, pictures, gildings, silver tea equipage, the heavy scented flowers, soft shaded lamps, the sparkle of diamonds, the titled, appreciative friends in one searching glance—that she had deserted —yes, that was the proper word—deserted him and Harry. Even as he watched her, she was nursing a Chinese lap dog (a hideous beast in his opinion), and calling the attention of her companions

to her darling Chow-chow's charms. "Look at his lovely curled tail!" he heard her exclaim, "and his beautiful little black tongue!" And, meanwhile, the farmer's wife was nursing *her* child, who did not recognize his mother when he saw her.

CHAPTER XXX.

MARRIED OR SINGLE?

Mr. West and his new acquaintance had apparently an inexhaustible capital of conversation, and still kept up the ball, as other people departed one after the other. Madeline knew that Laurence was resolved to sit them all out, for, as he laid his cup and saucer beside her, he said, in a whisper only audible to her, "I'm going to wait, I must have a word with you alone."

After a time, when he was positively the last visitor, and the clock was pointing to half past six, he too rose and took

leave of Mr. West—who expressed a cordial hope that they would see him whenever they came back to town—and of Madeline, who instead of ringing the bell, crossed the room with the visitor, airily remarking to her father, "I'm just going to show Mr. Wynne that last little picture you bought at Christy's—he is so fond of paintings. I'll be back immediately"—effecting her escape at the same moment by opening another door, through which she waved her husband, saying hurriedly, "In here, in here, the picture is there. Come along and stand before it; and now *what* is it?"

The room was dimly lit, and there was not much light upon the painting, but that was of no consequence to Laurence Wynne. He, however, took his stand before it, glanced at it, and then, turning to his companion, said gravely, "All

right. I've come to answer your letter in *person*."

"Laurence! I never knew of such madness! Talk of my going to your chambers—it was nothing; but for you to venture here——" and her eyes and gesture became tragic. "Positively, when I saw you walk in, I felt on the point of fainting."

"I am glad, however, that you did not get *beyond* that point. I was surprised to see your father so well; after your account of him——"

"Oh, that was written more than a fortnight ago; he is much better—but weather bound—on account of the snow in the south.

"Well, yes; and your letter was overlooked, and not forwarded. I've been away on circuit."

"I believe you don't care whether I

never write to you or not; nor to hear what I'm doing?"

"Oh, but, you know, I am always well posted in the society papers."

"Society papers!"

"Yes; I see them at my club. Besides, I can actually rise to a couple of sixpences a week—and I read how the lovely Miss West was at a ball, looking very smart in straw colour; or had been observed at church parade wearing her new sables; or shopping in Bond Street, looking very bright and happy; or—at—the theatre glorified in diamonds and gold embroideries. However, I have at last made your father's acquaintance; he does not seem to be such a terrible ogre! You may have noticed how pleasant he was to me; we got on like a house on fire. I do not think that your disclosure will have the awful consequence you anticipate,

and I am perfectly confident that it will be attended with no ill effects as regards his health. I am sure you have taken a wrong estimate of his character. He may fly into a passion just at first—I fancy you may expect *that*—but he will calm down, and we shall all be very good friends; and I am certain he will be delighted with Harry."

"I am not at all so sanguine as to that," returned his wife dubiously; "and you have not yet told me, Laurence —and we have no time to lose—*what* has brought you here?"

"I came, as I have said before, to answer your letter in person. I am glad I have done so, I have seen things with my own eyes, and I can realize your position more clearly than hitherto. I see you surrounded with luxury. A duchess could have no more. I see your

father, by no means the frail invalid that I was led to expect; I see your friends—your—pausing expressively—*admirers!* I've had, in short, a glimpse into your life, and realized the powerful cords—you call them claims—that bind you here, and have drawn you away from me." He paused again for a moment, making a quick gesture with his hand to show that Madeline must hear him out. "And now I have come to tell you my last word. You will—or, if you wish, *I* will—tell your father the truth now—within the hour. It will then depend upon circumstances, whether you leave England or not. If your father wishes to have you and Harry with him, I shall say nothing against it."

Madeline listened to this long and authoritative speech with some dismay. This plan would not suit her at all. What would all her gay society friends

say—and most of them were coming to the Riviera—if, instead of the brilliant Miss West, they found Mrs. Wynne—a prodigal daughter who had married without leave, and who was hampered with a teething baby? And Laurence was really becoming quite too overbearing! She would not give in—if she succumbed *now*, it was for always. What a fuss he was making, simply because she was going abroad for three months with her father.

"Surely you can wait until we come back. You see, papa is not in a state now for any sudden excitement. I will tell him if you wish in a month, when he has completely recovered——"

"I will wait no longer," interrupted her husband. "I have already waited on your good pleasure for close upon a year; put off time after time, with excuse after excuse, until such a period as you

could manage to screw your courage to the sticking-point. I now apprehend that that period will be of the same epoch as the Greek Kalends! Frankly, Madeline, I am not going to stand any more nonsense. I am your husband; I can support you—certainly only in a very modest fashion compared to this," looking round. "You will have no carriage, no maid, no fine clothes—at least not *yet*, they may come by-and-by. Your father is quite fit to travel alone; he ate a remarkably good tea, and told me that he had played two games of billiards this afternoon; were he really feeble, it would be a different affair. It is shameful—yes, that is the only word that will fit the subject—that I should have to remind you of your child! He should be your first care. Now, he *is* delicate, if you like; —he wants his mother, poor little chap!

You will stay at home and look after him. It may not be your pleasure, but it is unquestionably your duty. You can go to Mrs. Holt's and remain there and be welcome as long as you like. You were very happy there once, Maddie," he added rather wistfully. No answer; she merely raised her eyes, and surveyed him fixedly. "I will look about for a small furnished flat; a little villa at Norwood, or wherever you like. Lodgings, after *this*, would be too terrible a change—I must admit."

"So would the villa, or even the small flat," she said to herself. In one glance she beheld her future: two servants, *perhaps*; two sitting-rooms, *perhaps*; a strip of back garden with stockings on a line; Laurence absent from morning till night; nothing to do all day long, but attend to her frugal

housekeeping; no smart frocks; no smart friends; no excitement, amusements, or society.

She glanced at Laurence. Yes, his linen was frayed, there was a hole in one of his gloves, and in her heart there flared up a passionate hatred of genteel poverty; it was not life, it was a mere dragged-out existence, from Sunday to Sunday—from a sirloin of beef to a forequarter of mutton. Ugh! And, on the other hand, the trip on the Princesse de Lynxky's yacht, the already made up party for the carnival, the dresses that she had ordered for both; the costumes that were to dazzle Nice; the sketch for her carriage at the battle of flowers. At last she said—

"The child is perfectly well, Laurence. I saw him a week ago, and he was then the picture of health. He

is too young to trouble any one yet, and Mrs. Holt is an excellent person. Pray how many children are sent out to nurse, and their parents never see them for two or three years? It is always done in France, where they manage things so much better than we do. When Harry is older, it will be quite different; at present it is all the same to a baby where he is, as long as he is well cared for. You have suddenly become most arbitrary and tyrannical; and as to my leaving you for a few months, what is it after all? Look how wives leave their husbands in India, and come home for years!" resolved that all the hard hitting should not be on his side. "You are not like what you used to be, and you are very cruel to call my conduct *shameful*—and very rude, too. You are not going the right way to work, if you want to recall

me home—to your home. I may be led, but I won't be driven. I shall take my own way about papa, and tell him at my own time; and, what is more, I shall certainly accompany him to the Riviera, and when I return I hope," speaking breathlessly, and in little short gasps, "I hope that I shall find you in a more agreeable frame of mind."

There was an appreciable pause, and then he said, in a tone of angry astonishment, "Are you in earnest, Madeline?"

"In earnest? Of course I am!"

She looked at him; he had grown visibly paler, and there was a strange expression in his eyes that she did not remember to have ever seen before. Then, speaking in a low repressed voice—

"In that case I must ask you now to make your choice, once for all, between your two characters. You must for the

future always be known as Miss West, or Mrs. Wynne. We will not have this double-dealing any longer. Now, which will you be, married or single?" keeping his eyes steadily fixed on her with a look of quiet determination. "If you wish, we can bury the past."

No reply. Madeline's mind was a battle-field of doubt, fear, amazement, anger, and self-will.

"Speak, Madeline!" he reiterated impatiently. "Married or single?"

"If it were not for the child," she burst out passionately; "if my life is to be made a burthen to me like *this*; if you are always to be reproaching and scolding me——"

"I see," he interrupted quickly, "you would rather be Miss West. The child, I know, is a flimsy excuse, and of no importance; but please to give me a direct

answer. I must have it from your own lips."

At this critical juncture the door was opened, and Mr. West, somewhat irascible from having been left so long alone (Mrs. Leach was dressing for dinner) came in, saying, "Well—well—well—Madeline, what *is* the meaning of this? the room is half in darkness. What the deuce has kept you—has that fellow——? Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Wynne, I did not know you were still here. Can't have seen much of the pictures, unless you and Madeline have eyes like cats." (No, they had only been fighting like cats.)

"Answer me, Madeline," whispered Laurence in a hurried undertone, holding her hand like a vice. This action was not seen by Mr. West, who had his back to them, and was occupied with the

poker. "Married or single? Now is the time—I shall tell him."

"*Single!*" replied Madeline, hastily wrenching her hand away, spurred by immediate fears, and regardless of all but the present moment.

"So be it," was the low rejoinder.

And Mr. West, as he vigorously poked the fire, and furiously pressed the bell, had no more idea than poker or button of the important tie that had just been severed.

Mr. Wynne, looking rather white and stern, came over, and again took his leave and, without any farewell to Madeline, who was still standing in the background in the dusk, he opened the door and departed.

"What have you been doing in here all this time?" asked Mr. West querulously. "What the deuce have you been

about? Looked to *me* as if you and that fellow had been having a row. Never saw him before. Nice gentlemanly chap. None of your 'Yaw-haw' sort of people, with no more brains than a pin, and as much conceit as a flock of peacocks. No, this man has sense. I—— By the way, Maddie, you look rather put out, too, eh? He has not been proposing for you, has he? Come now, tell your old daddy," facetiously. "Make a clean breast of it."

"No, papa," she answered, in a rather shaky tone, "he has not; that is just the last thing he would do. You won't see him again, that's one comfort!" she added, with a final blaze of temper.

"Comfort, comfort? Not a bit of it. I'd like to see more of him; and when we come back, remind me to ask him to dinner—he belongs to the Foolscap

Club—don't forget. What's his name—Wills—Witts?"

"Wynne."

"Yes, yes, to be sure! A barrister. Humph! one of the Wynnes of Rivals Wynne—good old family. Looks a clever chap, too. Bound to *win*, eh? Not bad, eh?" chuckling. "But what were you talking about. You've not told me *that* yet?"

"We were quarrelling, papa, that's all. Our first and last quarrel," attempting to laugh it off, with a laugh that was almost hysterical. "There's the first gong!"

"So it is; and I'm quite peckish. Look sharp and dress!" setting an example on the spot by hurrying out of the room, stick in hand, which stick went tapping all the way down the corridor, till the sound was lost in the distance.

Still, Madeline did not stir. She took

a step and looked at the picture. Strange omen! It represented a farewell—a man and a girl. The man was a soldier, one of Bonaparte's heroes, and his face was turned away—the girl was weeping. Then she walked over to the fire, and stood looking into it with her hands tightly clasped, her heart beating rather quickly—the after-effects of her late exciting interview. Her mind was tossed about among conflicting emotions—indignation with Laurence, relief, regret, all stirring like a swarm of bees suddenly disturbed. "What had possessed her to marry Laurence Wynne?" she asked herself, now looking back on their marriage from the lofty eminence of a spoiled, adulated, and wealthy beauty. A certain bitter grudge against him and their days of poverty, and the hateful existence into which he would drag her back, animated

her feelings as she stood before the fire alone.

Such an overbearing, obstinate sort of partner would never suit her now. He deserved to be taken at his word—though of course he never meant it. The idea of any sane man relinquishing such a wife never dawned upon her. Yes—her heart was hot within her—he might go. As to the child, that was another matter; *he* was still, of course, her own pretty darling.

They had never, she and Laurence, had a rift upon the tuneful lute; and now a little plain speaking and a few angry words had parted them for life, as he had said. So be it.

"So be it," she echoed aloud, and pulling a chain from the inside of her dress, she unfastened it, slipped off her wedding ring, and dropped it into the

fire, which her father had poked up to some purpose—little dreaming for what an occasion it would serve.

Then Madeline went at last, and scrambled into her tea-gown with haste, and was just down, luckily for herself, in the nick of time.

After dinner, she was quite feverishly gay. She meant to thoroughly enjoy herself, without any *arrières pensées*. Her sword of Damocles had been removed. She went to the piano, and sang song after song with a feeling that she must do something to keep up her somewhat limp self-esteem and her rapidly falling spirits.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FALSE ALARM.

Mr. West had enjoyed his dinner; his appetite was excellent—on a par with his daughter's spirits. He asked no more troublesome questions, and departed to bed at an early hour. Mrs. Leach, too, had retired (pleading fatigue), to enjoy a French novel and cocaine, leaving Madeline to sing and make merry alone! After a while she went over and sat on the fender-stool, and had a long conversation with herself, and tried to persuade her conscience that she had done right. She offered it a sop in assuring

herself that the next morning she would go down to the Holt farm and see Harry, and have a comfortable talk with his nurse. Her father would not be out of bed till twelve o'clock. Mrs. Leach, too, rarely appeared before lunch. The coast would be clear. She carried out this resolution to the letter, starting from Waterloo by an early train, arriving a little after ten at the farm in the station fly, greatly to Mrs. Holt's amazement.

She asked many questions, and was warmly assured that "though little Harry was not to say a big, strong boy, like Tom the ploughman's child, of the same age, yet that nothing ailed him but his teeth, and that his eye teeth were through, and that she (his mother) need not give herself no uneasiness. Mr. Wynne was full of fancies. He was

down twice last week, and had been alarming her for nothing."

"Mr. Wynne—Mr. Wynne," said Madeline, becoming agitated and feeling a certain tightness in her throat; but knowing that the fact she was about to disclose must come out sooner or later, and that the first blow was half the battle; "Mr. Wynne and I have had a serious disagreement. We have agreed to differ—and to part," looking steadily out of the window, whilst her face took a delicate shade of red.

"Laws! gracious mercy!" ejaculated her listener, nearly dropping Master Wynne. "You don't say so! Goodness gracious! you don't mean it, ma'am; you are joking."

"No, indeed"—very decidedly—"I am not, Mrs. Holt; and you need not call me ma'am any more, for though I

am married, I am going back to be Miss West—always. Please never call me Mrs. Wynne again."

"But you can't do that," exclaimed Mrs. Holt, in a loud tone of expostulation; "you are married right and tight as I am, unless," lowering her voice, "it's a *divorce* you are after getting?"

"Divorce? No. Nothing of the kind; but Mr. Wynne and I have agreed to be—be strangers, and to forget that we have ever been married; and as I am only known to most people as Miss West, it will be quite easy."

"It's nothing of the sort, ma'am," cried the other, energetically, "and you are mad to think of it. Why, I might just as well go and call myself Kate Fisher once more, and give out I was never wed to Holt! That would be a fine how-do-you-do! And where there's

children it's worse and more wicked, and more ridiculous to think of still. What's to be said and done about this boy? Who is his mother? You can't say Miss West, now can you? Believe me," seeing her visitor's face of crimson astonishment, "it won't *do*. It's just one of those common squabbles among married folks that blow over. Why, Holt and I has 'ad many a tiff, and we are none the worse. You and Mr. Wynne just make it up. You are both young, and maybe he is determined, and likes to have his own way, as most men do; but—excuse me, ma'am, as an humble friend and a much older woman than yourself, if I make too bold—you *are* a bit trying. You see it's not usual for a young fellow to have his wife leave him, and go galavanting about as a single lady; and then Mr. Wynne is greatly set upon

the child. A man, of course, expects that his wife will look after his children *herself*. Excuse me again if I make too free, but I don't like to see a young girl going astray, whoever she be, without just giving her a *word*," wiping her face with a red-spotted handkerchief. (The family was largely supplied with this favourite pattern.)

Madeline sat in silence, feeling very uncomfortable and wretched; but all the same, obstinately bent on her own way.

"Mrs. Holt, you forget there are two sides to a question," she said at last. "I know you mean very kindly; but I have to consider my father. He has no one but me. He is an invalid, and I am his only child, and must study his wishes."

"Maybe if he wasn't so *rich*, you wouldn't think of him so much," put in Mrs. Holt, bluntly.

"Yes, I would," retorted Madeline, stung by the sneer; "but I see you are prejudiced, Mrs. Holt. You forget what the Bible says about honouring your father and mother."

"No, no, I don't; but the Bible says a deal about husbands and wives too. I don't forget *that*. Stick to your husband; it's the law o' the land and the law o' the Bible," said Mrs. Holt in her most unyielding voice.

She said a great deal more, but she failed to persuade her visitor or to bend her pride, and she soon perceived that it was of no avail. Money and grandeur, she told herself, had turned her poor head. Some day she would be sorry for what she was doing now; and, anyway, it was an ill and thankless task for a third person to meddle between a married couple. She had always known that *he*

was the better of the two; and maybe Holt would allow she was right *now!* Here was a young lady, turning her back on husband and child, taking her maiden name again, and going off to foreign countries. Pretty doings! pretty doings!

At eleven o'clock the fly-man notified that time was up, and the lady must go if she wanted to catch her train. She kissed little Harry over and over again, and wept one or two tears as she said—

"How I wish I could take him with me, even if I could smuggle him as my maid's little boy!"

"Sakes and stars! Mrs. Wynne," exclaimed Mrs. Holt, angrily. "Whatever are you thinking of? I wish his father heard you pass him off as a servant's child. Well, upon my word! I never——" At this crisis words ran short and utterance completely failed her.

"Mind you write to me often, Mrs. Holt—even one line. I have left you a packet of addressed and stamped envelopes. Please write at least once a week," and, with a hurried good-bye she stepped into the fly, pulled down her veil, and was driven off, leaving Mrs. Holt and her son upon the steps, the former exclaiming—

"Well, if she don't beat all!" whilst Master Wynne dragged violently at her apron, and, pointing to the rapidly disappearing carriage, shouted gleefully—

"Gee-gee! Gee-gee!"

* * * * *

"It is all right, my dear," whispered Mrs. Leach, receiving her with a significant nod. "I told your father you had gone to lunch with the Countess of Cabinteely, and he was perfectly satisfied."

In another week Madeline was very pleasantly settled in a charming villa at Nice looking out over the blue tideless sea and the Promenade des Anglais. She had a landau and pair, a pony carriage, and an "at home" day, for not a few of their London acquaintances, early as it was, had come south.

Her father rapidly regained his usual health and amiability, and lavished presents upon her. The horizon before her was literally and metaphorically bright. She was surrounded by quite a brilliant pageantry of flatterers and followers, and could not help feeling a pardonable pride in the sensation she created and in her remarkable social triumphs—in finding bouquets left daily at her door, in seeing her name in enthusiastic little paragraphs in the local papers, in hearing that the fact of her expected presence

brought numbers to an assembly or entertainment in order to see the lovely Miss West, to know that she had not an ambition in the world unfulfilled.

Was not this all-sufficient to prove that her millennium of happiness had commenced? She was the beauty of the season, though she was in this particular the victim of an unsought reputation; she had never aspired to the honour, and the character had been forced upon her. All the same, she did not dislike the position of social queen; and as to Mr. West, he gloried in the fact, and basked in the light of her reflected splendour. He was even content to be known as "Miss West's father." As some men pride themselves on their family, their estates, race-horses, pictures, collection of old china, or silver, he prided himself upon his *daughter*, and

was convinced that he got more enjoyment out of his hobby than most people. She was always *en evidence*, and he could see the curious, envious, and admiring eyes, as he drove with her about Nice, walked with her on the British Quarter-deck at Monte Carlo, or escorted her to concerts, receptions, balls, or garden parties. Foreign dukes and princes were supremely affable to him—all on account of the *beaux yeux* of his charming and celebrated Madeline.

Worth and Doucet had *carte blanche*, for Madeline's costumes must be worthy of her, and Madeline was not averse to the idea. A new hat, which became the rage, was named after her. Such is fame! A new yacht had been honoured by the same distinction. Youth, beauty, wealth, celebrity—even Fortune seemed to go out of her way to crowd favours upon

this lucky young lady; but, alas! we all know that fortune is a fickle jade, who smiles at one moment, and who scowls the next. Thus, as a kind of social divinity in a gay, earthly Paradise, winter glided on with Madeline. Spring had appeared with a radiant face and a train of flowers; the turf under the olives was covered with anemones, the valleys were starred with primroses; jonquils, tea-roses, and narcissus filled the air with fragrance. Sea and sky reflected one another—sunbeams glanced from the waves, the water seemed to laugh, and the whole face of Nature was one good-natured smile.

The Riviera was full, the carnival about to commence. Madeline was in a state of feverish gaiety and exhilaration. She could not now exist without excitement; she must always be doing something or

going somewhere, and required a rapid succession of amusements, from a "*promenade aux ânes*" up the valleys, to riding a bicycle; from a tea picnic to playing *trente et quarante*. All her regrets, and all her little twinges of remorse (and she had experienced some) had succumbed to the anodyne of a season on the Riviera—and such a season! But on the very first day of the carnival her spirits received a rude shock in the form of an ill-spelt scrawl from Mrs. Holt, which ran as follows:—

"Honoured Madam,

"I think it rite to let you no, as little Harry has been verry poorly the last two days; in case he is not better I think you ought to know, and mite wish to come home. It's his back teath. The Docter looked very cerrius last

evening, and spoke of konvulshions, but I don't wish to frighten you.

"I am your humble servant,

"KATE HOLT."

This was a heavy blow. The rush of maternal impulse swept everything else out of her mind. Madeline thrust aside her diamonds, ball dress, masks, bouquets, and hurried off on foot to the telegraph office, and despatched a message—"If he is not better I start to-night; reply paid." And then she returned to the Villa Coralie, quivering and trembling with impatience.

In case of the worst, she told Josephine to pack a few things, as she might be going to England that night by the Rapide.

Josephine's jaw dropped; she was enjoying herself enormously. One of the

waiters at the Cercle was her cousin. The carnival was just commencing; this was terrible—must she be torn away too! Her face expressed her feelings most accurately, and her mistress hastened to reassure her.

"I shall not require you, Josephine; I only go to see a sick friend. If I hear no good news, I start this evening; if the tidings are better, I remain—but I am almost sure to go."

"Et monsieur?" elevating hands and eyebrows.

Yes, how was she to announce her departure to her father? She made the plunge at once. Her fears and her anxieties were not on his account now. She was desperate, and ready to brave anything or anybody.

She ran down into his cool sanctum, with its wide-open windows overlooking

the bay, its gaudy, striped awnings, and verandah full of flowers, and finding her parent smoking a cigarette and absorbed in the *Financial News*, began at once.

"Papa, I've had bad news from England. A—one who is very dear to me is ill, and if I don't hear better news by telegram, I wish to start to-night for London."

"Madeline!" he cried, laying down the paper and gazing at her in angry astonishment. "What are you thinking about? Your sick friend has her own relatives; they would never expect *you* to go flying to her bedside from the other end of France. Nonsense, nonsense!" he concluded imperatively, once more taking up the news, and arranging his *pince-nez* with grave deliberation.

The matter was decided. But Madeline was resolved to make an equal show

of determination, and said, in a stubborn tone—

"Papa, in this I must have my way. It is not often I take my own course; I do everything and go everywhere to please you. You must allow me to please myself for once."

Mr. West pushed back his chair a full yard, and gazed at his daughter.

"Do not throw any obstacle in my way, papa, nor seek to know where I am going."

"Ah, ah! Not a lover, I hope, madam?" he gasped. "The curate, the —the drawing-master?"

"No; let that suffice, and let us understand one another, once for all. I have been an obedient daughter to you; I have made sacrifices that you have never dreamt of"—(Ah! the poor curate! thought Mr. West)—"and you must give

me more liberty. I am of age to go and come as I please unquestioned. I will do nothing wrong; you may trust me. I can take excellent care of myself, and I *must* have more freedom."

"Must, must, must! How many more 'musts'? Well, at any rate, you are a girl to be trusted, and there is something in what you say. I dare say you have sacrificed some girlish fancy; you have nursed me; you are a credit to me. Yes, and you shall come and go as you please, on the trust-me-all-in-all principle, and the understanding that you do not compromise yourself in any way; but you have your advantages, Madeline—a fine home and position, and everything money can buy. Remember, you will miss the best ball if you start to-night, and the Princess Raggawuffinsky was to call for you. Have you thought of *that?*"

"Oh!" with a frantic wave of her hand, "what is a *ball?*"

"Well, well, well! How much cash do you require, and when will you be back?"

"I have plenty of money. If all goes well, I shall be back in a few days—as soon as possible—for the regatta, perhaps."

And so, with a few more remarks and assurances, and expostulations on Mr. West's part at her travelling alone, she pocketed a cheque pressed upon her, and left the room victorious.

Her father was easier to deal with than she had anticipated. Laurence was right—for once!

Then she ran upstairs to her own sanctum and locked the door, pulled off her dress, put on her cool dressing-wrapper, and sat down in a fever of mind

and body to wait for the telegram. She remained motionless, with her eyes fastened on the clock, a prey to the wildest fears. Supposing the child was dead!—she shuddered involuntarily; if it *were*, she would go out of her senses. Her anxiety increased with every hour. She was in a frenzy of impatience, now pacing the room, now sitting, now standing, now kneeling in prayer.

At last there was a knock at the door —Josephine's knock. Josephine's voice, "Une dépêche pour vous, mademoiselle."

Mademoiselle's hand shook so much that she could hardly open the door, hardly tear asunder the envelope, or read its contents—at a gulp. Josephine had never seen her mistress in this frenzied, distraught condition—her colour like death, her face haggard, her eyes staring, her hair hanging in loose *abandon*. What

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did it mean? The telegram brought good news. It said, "He is much better, and in no danger. You need not come."

The sender's name was not notified. Whoever it was, it mattered little; the relief was inexpressible. What a fright Mrs. Holt had given her, and all for nothing!

Miss West went to the ball that night, and danced until the dawn flickered along the horizon. She was one of the most brilliant figures at the carnival, and received marked notice in distinguished quarters. At the battle of flowers, she and her equipage were the cynosure of all eyes. The open victoria was made to counterfeit a crown, and covered with pink and white azaleas. Miss West was attired to correspond. Four beautiful white horses were harnessed in pink, and ridden by postilions in pink satin jackets; and the

general effect was such that the committee promptly awarded the first banner to "la belle Anglaise," despite the close rivalry of a celebrated demi-mondaine, who furiously flung the second banner in the faces of the judges, and, with her yellow flowers and four black ponies, had whirled off in high dudgeon and a cloud of dust.

At last this enchanting period was brought to an end by the Riviera's own best patron—the sun. People melted away as if by magic. Some went on to the Italian lakes, some to Switzerland, many to England. Madeline and her father deferred their return until the end of May, stopping in Paris en route; and when they reached home the season was at its height, and the hall and library tables were white from a heavy fall of visiting-cards and notes of invitation.

Lady Rachel and Lord Tony came in on the evening of their arrival to pay a little neighbourly call, and to tell them that they must on no account miss a great match—the final in a polo tournament at Hurlingham—the next afternoon. Every one would be there.

This speech acted as a trumpet-call to Mr. West.

"Every one will see that we have returned," he said to himself, and it will save a lot of trouble. Then, aloud, "All right, then, Lady Rachel, we shall certainly go. Madeline must trot out some one of her smart Paris frocks. And, Madeline, you might send a wire over to Mrs. Leach, and offer her a seat down."

CHAPTER XXXII.

MR. JESSOP'S SUGGESTION.

Laurence Wynne had taken but one person into his confidence, and that was Mr. Jessop. As he sat smoking a post-midnight cigar over the fire in his friend's chambers, he told him that Mrs. Wynne no longer existed. She preferred to stick to her name of West, and wished to keep her marriage a secret always from—not alone her father, but the whole world.

This much he had divulged. He felt that he must speak to some one. His heart was so sore that he could not maintain total silence, and who so fitting a

confidant as his old friend Dick Jessop? He was chivalrous to Madeline in spite of all that had come and gone, and veiled her defects as skilfully as he could, not speaking out of the full bitterness of his soul. But Mr. Jessop's active imagination filled in all the delicately traced outline—perhaps in rather too black a shading, if the truth were known!

However, he kept his surmises discreetly to himself, and puffed and pondered for a long time in silence. At last he spoke.

"I would let her alone, and not bother my head about her, Laurence! She is bound to come back."

"I don't think so," responded the other, curtly.

"Yes; she will return on account of the child."

"And what would such a coming-

back be worth to *me?* It will not be for my sake," said Wynne, holding his feelings under strong restraint.

"I know of something that would bring her, like a shot out of a seventy-four pounder," observed Mr. Jessop after another pause, surveying the coals meditatively as he spoke.

"What?"

"Your paying attention to another woman. Get up a strong and *remarkable* flirtation with some pretty, smart society matron. Lots of them love your stories. Love me, love my stories. Love my stories, love me, eh? Show yourself in the park, at theatres—better still, a little dinner at the Savoy—and Mrs. Wynne will be on in the scene before you can say Jack Robinson! Jealousy will fetch her!"

"I wouldn't give a straw for the

affection of a woman who was influenced solely by what you have suggested. No, no; I married her before she knew her own mind—before she had a chance of seeing other people, and the world. Now she has seen other people, and become acquainted with the world, she prefers both to *me*. On five or six hundred a year, with no rich relations, Madeline and I would have been happy enough. As it is, she is happy enough. I must get on alone as well as I can. I made a mistake. I was too hasty."

"Yes, marry in haste, and repent at leisure!" said Mr. Jessop, grimly.

"I don't mean that; I mean that I mulled that business at Mrs. Harper's. I should have wired to Mrs. Wolferton, or insisted on Mrs. Harper taking Madeline back, and given her time to turn round and to reflect; but I rushed the

whole thing. However, I must now abide by the position I am placed in with what fortitude I can."

"You married her, and gave her a home, when she had no friend," put in Mr. Jessop, sharply. Mr. Jessop was devoted to Laurence, and excessively angry with Laurence's wife.

"It is not every one I would confide in, Dick," said his companion; "but you are my oldest chum. You are welcome to be introduced to the skeleton in my cupboard—an old friend's privilege. We need never talk of this again. I suppose people get over these things in time! There is nothing for it but work—plenty of work."

Although he discoursed in this cool, self-restrained manner, Mr. Jessop knew, by years of experience, that his friend—who never made much, or, indeed, any,

fuss about his feelings—had felt the blow in every nerve of his body.

"Do not think too hardly of her, Dicky," he exclaimed, promptly reading the other's thoughts. "She is very young, and very pretty. I'm only a poor, hard-working barrister; and she had an awful time once — you know when! We must never forget how she came through that ordeal And, after all, I have no human rival. If she does not care for me, she cares for no other man. She is blessed with a particularly cool, unsusceptible temperament. My only rival is riches. It is the money that has ousted me. The enormous strength of wealth has pushed me out of her heart, and barred the door. Time, another powerful engine, may thrust her out of mine!"

"Time! Bosh. Time will never thrust

away the fact that she is the mother of your child. He is a tie between you that neither time, riches, nor any amount of balderdash you may talk—nor any number of matrimonial squabbles—can ever break."

"You are mistaken in your idea of the whole case, Jessop, and under a totally wrong impression. Nothing can bridge the gulf between Madeline and me, unless she chooses to come back of her own accord, and unsay a good deal that she has said; and this she will never do—never. She does not care a straw for me. I merely remind her of days of squallor, sickness, and hideous poverty. She was delighted to accept the freedom which I offered her——"

"And what a fool you were to do it!" exclaimed his listener, contemptuously.

"Not at all; but I should be a fool

were I to try to keep a wife, who is not even one in name, and never casts a thought to me from month's end to month's end. I shall be—nay, I am—free too."

"But not in a legal sense, my dear boy; you cannot marry again."

"No, thank you," emphatically knocking the ashes off his cigar with great deliberation as he spoke. "The burnt child dreads the fire. I made a bad start this time, and even if I had the chance—which, please God, I never shall have—I would not tempt Fate again, no matter what the provocation. Women are a great mystery: their chief faults and virtues are so unexpected. Look at Madeline: when we were paupers she was a ministering angel. Now that she is rich, she is merely, a smart society girl, and——"

"And milliners, jewellers, flatterers minister to *her*," broke in Jessop.

"I intend to make my profession my mistress, and to devote myself to her heart and soul. The law is a steady old lady."

"And a very cantankerous, hard, flinty-faced, capricious old hag you'll find the goddess of Justice, my dear fellow. I am going to give up paying my addresses to her! My uncle has left me a tidy legacy. I intend to settle down in comfort in his old manor-house—shoot, fish, hunt, burn my wig, gown, and law books, and turn my back for ever on the Inns of Court."

"Jessop, you are not in earnest."

"I am," impressively; "and what's one man's loss is another man's gain. It will be all the better for you, Laurence, since you are so bent upon the woolsack. I'll

give you a heave-up with pleasure. You will now get all Bagge and Keepe's business, for one thing—and, let me tell you, that that is no trifle.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"ONE OF YOUR GREATEST ADMIRERS."

It was a perfect afternoon, and Hurlingham was crowded. Every seat bordering the polo ground was occupied, and the brilliant hues of hats, gowns, and parasols made a sort of ribbon border to the brilliant green turf. Mr. West—a fussy or punctual man, according to people's point of view—had arrived early with his party, and, so to speak, planted his fair charges under one of the umbrella awnings, and in a most central and commanding situation, where Madeline, in a white costume, which set off her

vivid dark beauty, was seen and greeted by many acquaintances. Lord Montycute, Captain Vansittart, and a smart lady friend (Mrs. Veryphast) shared the shade of the canvas umbrella, and spasmodically proffered morsels of the latest and choicest news, for the polo was absorbing, the match very fast and closely contested, the excitement intense. During an interval Lady Rachel drifted near—clad in a rainbow costume, and talking volubly and emphatically to a man. Her quick, roving eye caught sight of Madeline's comfortable little party, and she swept down upon her at once.

"Oh, Maddie, my dear girl, how nice and cool you look, and I'm half dead, standing baking in the sun, and not a chair to be had for love or money! Ah, you have two to spare, I see! Here—here is actually one for *you*." She called

to her escort, who had stopped to speak to a passing friend. "Madeline," she continued, "I think you know Mr. Wynne, who writes. Mr. Wynne, Miss West is one of your greatest admirers! She knows all your stories by heart."

This was a fiction, invented on the spur of the moment. Her ladyship coined many a little lie.

Madeline looked up bewildered. The gentleman who was taking off his hat to her was—Laurence!—and yet not Laurence. What had he done to himself? He had discarded his beard, and was fashionably clean-shaven; moreover he was fashionably dressed in the orthodox long frock-coat, and wore a flower in his buttonhole, and the most absolutely correct gloves and tie.

So much depends upon the style, shape, and colour of a man's tie—and the very

maker's name! A rashly selected tie may stamp a man's taste quite as fatally as the wrong number and pattern of buttons proclaim the date of his coat!

The removal of his beard had entirely changed Laurence Wynne's appearance. He looked much younger: he had a very square chin, his mouth was expressive—more sarcastic than smiling—with thin, firmly closed, but well-cut lips. Had she known of that mouth and chin, had she guessed at them—well, she would have thought twice before she married their proprietor. As she looked up she coloured to her hair when she met his steady, cool glance. This meeting was no surprise to him, for he had noted the *entrée* of the beauty, her marvellous costume, and her train of admirers. He had not, however, intended to come to such close quarters. He was taken

unawares when he found himself in her neighbourhood, and he was determined to escape immediately, in spite of Lady Rachel. The silence that followed Lady Rachel's loud prattle was becoming noticeable, and curious eyes were turned upon him when he said very distinctly—

"I don't know if I am so fortunate as to be remembered by—Miss West?"

"Oh yes," she answered, rather obviously avoiding looking at him, with a bright patch of colour on either cheek.

"Miss West has such an enormous acquaintance of young men that she must get a little confused sometimes—a little mixed, don't you, Maddie? Now, Mr. Wynne, I see what you are up to," said Lady Rachel; "but no, you shall not run away. Here, sit upon this chair. I had great difficulty in capturing you, you are so run-after and spoilt, and now

I am not going to let you desert. You ought to be thankful for a seat in the shade, and amongst such pleasant company!" As he reluctantly seated himself at the very outskirts of the group, she continued—"Now, you must not sit there looking like a snared animal, watching for some chance of escape. Do tell me all about the heroine of your last story. How is it that you are so familiar with all our little ways, and weaknesses? You know too much. One would almost suppose that you were a married man!"

"I think it must be time to go to tea," said Madeline, glancing appealingly at her father, who had just joined them.

"Tea! Don't you wish you may get it! There is not a single vacant table on the lawn. I've just been to look. Hullo! Ah—er—Wynne, how do you do?"

Mr. Wynne had been pointed out to

him as a rising junior at the bar—a coming man in literature, who wielded an able pen, and was quite one of the season's minor celebrities. His sketches were a feature of the day—a short one, naturally. Every one was talking of him.

Mr. West loved a celebrity—if he was gentlemanly and in good society, *bien entendu*—nearly as much as he loved a lord, but not quite; and he added—

"I remember you were at our house last winter, and you are interested in paintings and art. You must look us up, eh?—and come and dine."

"Thank you. You are very kind."

"We've just come back from the Riviera. Delightful place! Were you ever there?"

"No, I've never been nearer to it than Lyons."

"But I've been there," broke in Lady

Rachel; "and I shall never go again, on account of the earthquakes, although it was capital fun at the time."

"Fun!" repeated Mr. West, with a look of amazement.

"Yes, half the refugees were running about in blankets fastened with hairpins, afraid to return for their clothes. Oh, they were too absurd! A whole train full went to Paris in their dressing-gowns—some in bare feet. Every one was different—'out of themselves,' as they say in France. One old lady, in her mad excitement in speeding some relations, actually tore off her wig and waved it after them."

"Poor old dear! *How* she must have regretted it subsequently!" said Lord Montycute. "My sister was there at the same time, and paid twenty pounds a night for the luxury of sleeping in the

hotel omnibus. Nothing would induce her to go to bed indoors. The hotel was cracked from top to bottom!"

"I don't care for the Riviera," remarked Lady Rachel. "It's too hot, and the scenery is ridiculously gaudy. It always reminded me of a drop-scene. I declare to you, sitting on a promenade, facing the blue sea and blue sky, and pale, buff promontories and palms, with a band playing in the neighbourhood, I have felt as if I was in the stalls of a theatre."

"Oh, shame!" cried Mrs. Leach. "You have no feeling for the beauties of Nature."

"I thought Monte Carlo lovely—the garden too exquisite for words."

"And the tables?" inquired Mr. West significantly.

"Yes, I had my own *pet* table; and

at first I was successful. I always went on the 'doz-ens,' or 'passe.' One day I made ninety pounds in an hour; but, alas! I lost it all in about ten minutes."

"The tables always *do* win in the long run," said Mr. West, sententiously.

"Yes," agreed Lord Montycute, "they have no feeling, no emotions. When they gain they are not excited; when they lose they are not depressed; and this is their advantage."

"Oh, but they cannot leave off if they *are* losing," cried Lady Rachel. "We score there."

"*You* did not score, at any rate," remarked Mrs. Leach, with a smile.

"No; I wish I *had* left off. There is Mrs. Raymond Tufto. Did you see her at Nice, Madeline?"

"Oh yes; she went everywhere."

"She is wearing that same flower

toque. I *am* so sick of it," cried Mrs. Veryphast, impatiently.

"Nevertheless she is one of the prettiest women in London," observed Captain Vansittart. "She has such a saintly expression, and she looks so *good*."

"She is a horribly heartless wretch. She goes off for months on the Continent, and leaves her children to nurses at home," said Lady Rachel, viciously. "She has one dear little tot of two, that actually does not know her by sight."

"It is quite the French fashion to board out babies," remarked Mrs. Leach, who was invariably in opposition to Lady Rachel.

"Turn them out to walk like young hounds," drawled Captain Vansittart.

"Mrs. Tufto, bad as she may be, is nothing to Lady Blazer," continued Mrs. Leach, impressively. "She has a

nursery full of girls, and yet, what *do* you think? When she was asked the other day to subscribe to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, she said, 'Delighted! There is only one species of animal I loathe, and that's a *child*.'"

"Oh, I say—come! I don't believe that," cried Mr. West, "of any woman—or even a man. I'm rather partial to *nice* small children myself."

"Mr. Wynne," said Lady Rachel, turning on him suddenly, "why are you so silent? You know it is your *métier* to talk."

"Then why do you grudge me a well-earned holiday?" he asked inperturbably.

"I believe you are studying us for your next sketch; taking us in your literary kodak."

"No, indeed! I am not a reporter for a society paper."

"Oh, I don't mean about our dresses and hats, or that; I mean character sketches."

"How I should like to sit to you for *mine!*" said Mrs. Veryphast, vivaciously, moving her chair an inch or two nearer to his. "I *do* wish you would make a study of me, and put me in one of your charming stories or dialogues."

"It would have a fabulous circulation if *you* were the heroine," said Lord Montycute, with a bow.

Mrs. Veryphast smiled, well pleased. She was not always able to distinguish between impertinence and flattery. Mrs. Veryphast was evidently anxious to annex another ladies' friend, who had edged himself so far away that he was quite an outsider. But he would not be appropriated, neither could he effect his escape.

"Mr. Wynne," said Lady Rachel, briskly, "you are up in all the principal subjects of the day. Do tell us what you think of the new woman."

"That she will be an old woman in a few years."

"So shall I. You are meanly evading the question."

"I think—— Let me think again."

"You mean, let me *dream* again. You seem to be half asleep this afternoon. Well?"

"On reflection, I consider that she is a devastating social influence."

"That can be read in two ways, you wary fox. What is your opinion of the emancipation of women — wives especially?"

"Upon my word! Lady Rachel, I must protest!" he answered, with a somewhat fixed smile. "You are endeavouring to

obtain my opinion gratis. I cannot afford it. How am I to live?"

Meanwhile Madeline, looking rather pale, listened furtively to this passage of arms.

"I think you are *too* horrid. At any-rate, it cannot hurt your pocket to tell me if you approve of the higher education of my sex."

"No; I prefer the ancient Greek mode—complete isolation, wool-spinning, and no books."

"Gracious! I shall pity your *wife*."

His eyes and Madeline's met for one half-second all the way across Lady Rachel's bonnet and Captain Vansittart's broad shoulders. Then he stood up.

"What—going? Oh, Mr. Wynne!" protested his captor, with a little scream.

"I am extremely sorry; but I really *must*. I see a man over there that I

want to speak to particularly; and I shall lose sight of him if I don't look sharp." And taking off his hat with a comprehensive smile, he was gone.

Yes, Madeline watched him under her parasol. He looked as well as any one—in fact, quite distinguished. She wondered vaguely who was his tailor.

Then people began to discuss him, and she gathered by a word from Mrs. Veryphast, and another from Captain Vansittart, that the general opinion of Laurence Wynne was highly favourable.

"Of fine old stock, but poor; but brains, and good race, ought to bring him something," said Mrs. Leach.

"An heiress!" suggested Mrs. Veryphast, with a giggle. "And now I propose that we do adjourn, and go to tea."

From a distance Laurence noted the party *en route* to refreshments, Madeline

and Lord Montycute bringing up the rear. She belonged to another world than his, there was no room in her life for him and Harry. As he had chafed in Lady Rachel's chains, he had caught snatches of the conversation of the butterflies who fluttered round his wife. He heard of balls, river parties, rides, picnics. He was aware that Miss West's society was in immense demand; he caught one laughing announcement "that she had four engagements for the next evening, and not a spare hour for the next three weeks."

Not long after that, as he and a friend were walking down to Parsons Green station, they were passed by a splendid carriage, which gave a glimpse of two frothy-looking parasols, and two tall hats.

"There goes Miss West," explained his companion, "the Australian heiress

and beauty, with Lord Tony on the back seat. I hear it is quite settled, they are to be married in the autumn."

"Are they? Who is your authority?"

"I can't say; it's in the air. I wonder she was not snapped up, long ago, for although old West is about as common as they make 'em, yet every one allows that his daughter is charming."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. WYNNE IS A WIDOWER.

The first opportunity that Madeline could find she ventured a visit to the Holts. It was a lovely June morning as she walked up to the front entrance of the sequestered Farm. She found Harry—*her* Harry, a pretty little fellow with fair soft hair and surprised dark eyes, sitting alone upon the doorstep, and nursing a pointer pup. It was useless for her to ask in her most winning manner—

"Harry dear, don't you know me? Darling, I am your own mother; your own mummy!"

Harry simply frowned and shook his curls, and clutched the puppy tightly in his clasp as if he meant to throttle it.

Presently Mrs. Holt came upon the scene, with turned-up sleeves, and stout bare arms, fresh from the dairy. She was exceedingly civil, and exceedingly cool; invited Miss West into the little parlour, dusted a chair for her, and did her best to soften the rigidity and hauteur of little Harry's aspect.

After some conversation about his double teeth, the weather, and Nice, she said—

"Suppose you and he just go round the garden, ma'am, and make friends. I'll leave you to yourselves, whilst I go and see after the dinner."

"But pray don't get anything extra for *me*, Mrs. Holt," implored Madeline. "Just what you have yourselves. I shall

be very angry if you make a stranger of me."

Mrs. Holt muttered some incoherent reply, and went away saying to herself—

"Not make a stranger of you! and what else? Not make any difference for you! I'm thinking you'd look very glum if I were to set you down to beans and bacon, my grand young London madame. Dear me, but she *is* changed! She cannot stir without a sound of rustling; and the price of one of her rings would build a new barn!"

Meanwhile, Harry and his mother went round the garden as desired, hand-in-hand. He could talk very plainly for his age, and trotted along by her side, considerably thawed in manner. This process was due to a lovely ball she had unexpectedly produced, a gay picture-book, and a packet of candy.

He chattered away in a most friendly style, and showed her the pigeons, the bees, and where the lark was buried—in fact, all what he considered the lions of the place; and every moment unfolded to his delighted companion some additional marvel and charm.

By the time that one-o'clock dinner was ready, the couple were on excellent terms, and he had even gone so far as to kiss her, and to put his little holland-clad arms round her neck of his own accord. The sensation was extremely pleasant.

After dinner—*not* consisting of beans and bacon — Mrs. Holt and her guest had a long *tête-à-tête*. The condition of Harry's health was first disposed of, then the state of his wardrobe came under discussion.

"I should tell you, ma'am, since you

ask, that all the lovely frocks and pelisses you sent from France are just laying there. Mr. Wynne won't allow him to wear one of them, nor anything you gave him."

"And why not, pray?" demanded the young lady with considerably heightened colour.

"He told me quite serious, one day," said Mrs. Holt, now speaking with ill-suppressed satisfaction, "that what he had worn and *was* wearing, as you gave him, he might wear out; but no new things were to be accepted, as you had nothing to do with the child now. So I put them all by, just as they came, in the front room wardrobe, and there they are."

"What does he mean?" asked Madeline, in a sharp key.

"I'm sure, ma'am, *you* know better than I do; he said as he had no objection

to your seeing the child, now and then, but that was all. I expect Mr. Wynne can be real stiff and determined," smoothing out her apron with an air of solemn disapproval, not of him, but of her visitor.

Madeline said nothing, but she felt a good deal. Mrs. Holt, from her manner more than from her words, sat in judgment upon her. She, this wife of a common farmer, actually dared to criticise the beautiful and admired and spoiled Miss West.

"You see, ma'am," she continued, "you are, and you are not, the child's mother. He does not recognize you as that—I mean the child himself—you have kept away too long. In course you can't be in two places at once, nor be both Miss West and Mrs. Wynne. 'Tisn't my wish, nor my own doing, as I have taken your place with the child. He is main

fond of me. And then, poor Mr. Wynne, he felt your leaving him at first, no doubt of that; but he is getting over it now; men haven't as much feeling as we *think*."

Madeline listened with a guilty conscience, every word went home to her with as much force as a blow. She had chosen her line, and she must stick to single blessedness. There was to be no going back, at any rate at present.

This conviction made her reckless, and she rushed with eagerness into the full tide of London gaiety with a passionate desire to escape from the past, to get away from the clamouring of a still articulate conscience, to annihilate memory by some great and effective action, and to be happy! But memory was not so easily stifled, and now that Laurence had disappeared from her life—

such is the contrariness of humanity—she wished him back. At times, at races, at Hurlingham, in great assemblies, at the theatre, or in the Row, she searched the crowds for him in vain. Mrs. Leach, who was her constant companion and self-elected chaperon, reading her young friend by the light of her own memories, noticed that she was not like other girls, content and happy with her company and surroundings. There was a restlessness in her manner; she seemed to be continually looking for some one—some one who never came, who was never to be seen.

Madeline preferred Lady Rachel's, or Mrs. Lorimer's company to the splendid widow's society, and made futile efforts to shake off her shackles—efforts which were vain.

Yes, among all Madeline's social successes, in the midst of her most dazzling

triumphs, she ever cast a glance around in search of Laurence. Surely, if he went to see her in the full blaze of her triumph, he would think twice ere he permanently renounced such a treasure! She felt hot and angry when she thought of him, but nevertheless she longed to see him once more—odious, unreasonable, and tyrannical as he was. Surely he did not mean to abandon her in reality. That idea had no place in her mind when she was abroad. There everything and everybody seemed different. It was easy, in a strange country, far away from Laurence and Harry, to drop a misty cloud over the past, and to feel as if she really *was* Miss West. But here in London, where she had lived as a married woman, and had struggled—and oh, what a struggle!—with the awful question of how to support a household on nothing,

the idea was unnatural—nay, it went further, it was improper. She would perhaps write to him some day, and hold out the olive branch; but not yet, and meanwhile she must see him.

Mr. West was still extremely uneasy about himself. He found the heat, and dust, and noise of London trying to his health, he declared; and, much to the disgust of Mrs. Leach and other interested friends, he announced that the middle of July would not find him in England. He was going to Carlsbad, to Switzerland, and to winter abroad—probably at Biarritz.

Ere she was thus carried off, Madeline resolved to see Laurence. She prevailed upon Lady Rachel to take her to the Temple church. She was aware that he went there every Sunday, and Lady Rachel, little guessing the reason of her

friend's sudden enthusiasm for the venerable edifice, and anxiety to hear a certain well-known preacher, procured two tickets for benchers' seats, and occupied them the ensuing sabbath.

These seats were roomy and elevated, and commanded an excellent view of the whole centre of the church where the members of the various inns sat. They came in gradually, not in legal garb, as Madeline had half expected, but in their usual dress; and she strained her eyes so eagerly that her sharp little friend nudged her and said, "For whom are you looking, Maddie?"

"Oh, no one," colouring. "It is such a very interesting old place. I like staring about. What crowds of people who cannot get seats, and have to stand!"

At this juncture the organ pealed out, and every one stood up as the choir filed

in, and just immediately afterwards, Lady Rachel exclaimed in an excited whisper, "There's Mr. Wynne—look!"

Of course Madeline never moved her eyes from him; they followed him, as he found a seat at the end of a pew, luckily well within her view. He could not see her, but she could study him, especially when she knelt down, with her two hands shielding either side of her face, from watchful Lady Rachel.

He looked well, a little grave perhaps, a little worn; no doubt he was working hard. He did not stare about as did others, nor cast a single glance at the radiant figure in the benchers' seats. At times he seemed preoccupied and buried in thought, but he gave his undivided attention to the sermon, to which he listened with folded arms and a critical air, as if he were weighing every word of

it in his mind, and as though it were a summing up of evidence being laid before a jury of which he was a member. There was no abstracted air about him, his mind was on the alert, he had cast the past or future aside, and was absorbed in the present.

The sermon concluded, crowds flocked through the ancient doorway, and scattered outside. Lady Rachel still lingered, and looked about eagerly, ere taking her departure westward, and then she exclaimed, in a disgusted voice—

"I wanted to have asked Mr. Wynne to lunch, if I had seen him to speak to," shaking out her parasol and opening it with a jerk of annoyance. "But there he goes, marched off by that girl in the green and blue frock—the very sight of it turns me cold! And do you see the old papa rushing after them,

and accosting him with rapture? The way in which girls throw themselves at men's heads nowadays, is abominable. However, it's a mistake for these bold creatures to imagine that men will marry them. They either take a wife from the stage or music-hall, or some quiet little country mouse. As for Mr. Wynne, he is a widower, and I believe his wife was a perfect *horror*—so he will not be caught again! Ah, here's a hansom! Now, my dear girl, get in, get in. These dry sermons make me frightfully thirsty. I am dying for my lunch."

CHAPTER XXXV.

INFORMATION THANKFULLY RECEIVED.

The house in Belgrave Square remained closed for many months, whilst its master roamed from one fashionable continental resort to another, in search of what he called health — but which was merely another name for variety and amusement. Madeline was at first averse to this protracted absence; but she had excellent news of little Harry. Laurence was still in what she called "the sulks;" and every day weakened her hold more and more on her former ties, and bound her to her present condition. In the early twenties

a girl is very adaptable, and it had come to this, that at times Miss West forgot that she had ever had other than this sunny butterfly existence; and, if her conscience occasionally made a claim on behalf of her child, she promptly told herself that he was well cared for, and that Lady Frederick Talboys sent all her children out to nurse until they were three years of age, and Harry was barely two. As for Laurence, he would come to his senses in time; and the idea of telling her father of her marriage she now put away in the lumber-room of her brain, and rarely looked at.

About Christmas Mr. and Miss West and suite arrived at Biarritz, put up at a large and fashionable hotel, and occupied the best rooms on the first floor. They found Biarritz charming, Madeline liked the sea, the rolling

Atlantic breakers, the Basque tongue, and the bronzed semi-Spanish peasantry. Mr. West was charmed with the society, the golf links, and the Casino.

One day Mrs. Leach casually arrived at their hotel, with a number of basket-trunks and a maid, looking very handsome, and was enchanted to meet dearest Madeline and dear Mr. West. She had heard that they were at Pau, and was so surprised to discover them. Madeline was such a naughty girl about writing, such a hopelessly lazy correspondent.

To tell the truth, Miss West was secretly anxious to shake off the tenacious widow, and was purposely silent.

In less than a week the lady had resumed her sway over Madeline's papa. Her soft manners, pathetic eyes, stately presence, and low, caressing voice, proved his undoing. He had almost forgotten

the Honourable Mrs. Leach—and here, in three days, he was as much, or more, her slave as ever. So much for men's vanity and women's wiles. She flattered—he confided. It came to pass, as a matter of course, that the lady occupied a seat beside Madeline in the landau every afternoon. Her maid tripped down with her wraps and parasol precisely as if it were her mistress's own carriage. Her mistress also occupied Miss West's private sitting-room, received her friends in it, wrote, and worked, and read all the Wests' papers and books, shared their table at meals in the *salle à manger*, and (but this was never known to Madeline) her little weekly account for room and board was always furnished to and settled by Madeline's papa; a few whispered words on the balcony one night had arranged this trifling matter. The handsome

widow was completely identified with the West family, and was included in all their invitations as well as their accounts. Every evening, after dinner, she and Mr. West sat aloof in a little alcove whilst he smoked cigarettes, or on the verandah whilst he smoked and sipped his coffee, and she amused him and cut up many of the gay and unsuspicious company for his delectation. She was also confidential respecting her own affairs. If she had told him their true position his few scanty locks would have stood on end. She was almost at the end of her wits, and he was her sole hope, her last resource. For years she had lived beyond her income—a small one. Her dressmaker's bills would have staggered even him. She owed money in all directions; her creditors were pressing, her society friends were not

pressing with invitations; her husband's connections ignored her. But if she could establish herself in Mr. West's heart and home, as his second wife, she would have before her a new and delightful career. And she had begun well! Certainly Madeline was irresponsive and cool, but always pleasant and polite. Why was Madeline changed? However, once she was Madeline's mamma, Madeline would find a difference! Every night, as Mrs. Leach stepped into the lift, to be borne aloft to her own bower, she said to herself, "He will certainly propose to-morrow," but alas! one evening these cheering presentiments were crushed.

The conversation had turned upon Madeline. She was a favourite subject with her father.

"She nursed me well and pulled me through that nasty illness last winter.

I shall never forget her. One would have said she was accustomed to nursing —and nursing a man too, ha, ha! I should miss her terribly if she married."

"But there is no prospect of that at present, is there?" asked his listener softly.

"No. She is too stand-off. She will ride and dance, and talk and laugh, but once a man's attentions become marked, she freezes up! I'm afraid she is serious when she says she won't marry. There's Lord Tony hanging after her."

"Oh, don't you think he is very much *épris* with Miss Teale of New York?"

"Not he!" impatiently. "I dare say he and Madeline will settle it some day."

"And then how lonely you will be, dear Mr. West! *I* know what it is like."

"Yes, I suppose it will be a little dull, unless the young people will live with me."

"Oh!" rather sharply, "they won't do *that!*"

"If they don't, I shall have to set up another housekeeper, to get some one to take pity on me and marry again," and he looked significantly into Mrs. Leach's unabashed eyes.

Mrs. Leach held her breath.

"But I should never dream of doing that as long as Madeline is with me."

"So here was the matter in a nutshell," said his listener to herself, as she grasped her fan fiercely and closed her lips. Unless Madeline went off, he would never marry. The great thing, of course, was to get the girl settled. She passed her obvious admirers in lightning review. There was actually not one whom she could lay her finger upon as a possible son-in-law for the little gentleman beside her. She knew several who would have gladly

proposed to Madeline, but Madeline never gave them a chance. Why? She would make it her business to discover the reason why Miss Madeline was so cold and *difficile*, and to find out *who* he was? Mr. Jessop knew. Oh, if she only had a chance of exercising her fascination on that sour-looking barrister! Madeline had had a note from him recently, and she had been on the point of perusing it when she had been disturbed: she frequently mistook Madeline's letters for her own, and had glanced over a good deal of her correspondence. It had proved extremely commonplace, but she felt confident that Mr. Jessop's letter would be of absorbing interest.

Madeline was on the alert. She had taken a sincere dislike to this tall, dashing body-guard of hers, with her splendid toilettes, shocking meannesses,

her soft manners, and her sharp claws. She was aware that she tampered with her letters. She had surprised her (but not discovered herself); and seen her carry a piece of recently-used blotting-paper and hold it up before the sitting-room mirror; and she was aware, from Josephine, that Mrs. Leach had made an exhaustive search in her room, under pretence of seeking a fur collarette. Oh! she was a clumsy spy.

* * * * *

In March, when the English season was as its height, and every hotel and villa was packed, an elderly Englishwoman, wearing blue spectacles, and a small sandy-haired girl, wearing a tailor-made and sailor hat—that seal of British livery—toiled up the staircase of the Grand Hotel, followed by their luggage.

At the first landing the young lady stopped and stared at a very smart apparition which had just come out of a sitting-room—a pretty, tall girl, dressed with much elegance in a plum-coloured cloth coat and skirt, a white cloth waistcoat, white felt hat with purple velvet, white gloves, white sunshade. Could it be possible that she was Madeline West? Madeline, the pupil-teacher at Mrs. Harper's? She raised her eyes: yes, it *was* Madeline. She would speak.

"Madeline—West, I am sure. Don't you remember me at school — Nina Berwick?"

"Oh yes, of course," shaking hands.

"Growing up makes a difference, doesn't it?" (Growing rich makes a difference too.)

"You are staying here?" said Miss Berwick effusively.

"Yes, we have been here ever since Christmas."

"How nice! I hope we shall see a great deal of one another, and have talks over old times."

"Yes," assented Madeline, colouring, "that will be charming."

"You are not married, are you, Madeline?"

"What has put such an idea into your head?" was the misleading reply. Madeline was clever at evasion and subterfuge: practice makes perfect.

"You see we have been living abroad for two years, and are rather out of the way of news. I am living with my aunt, Lady Fitzsandy. She hates England. Well, I'm nearly dead, and very dusty and thirsty. Our rooms are on the *quatrième étage*, and the lift is out of order, I hear, so I must toil up.

Ta-ta!" and she hurried away after the porters and her relative."

Nina Berwick had left school just after the breaking-up—Madeline recalled this with a sensation of relief. She came from the borders of Scotland, and knew nothing; besides, she was always intensely stupid, and never could remember anything—names, dates, historical events, and even school events went through her sieve-like brain. She had not been a particular friend of Madeline's, and had only known her in those days when she had fallen from her high estate—never as the rich Miss West.

For her part, Nina Berwick was amazed at her friend's transformation. She occupied a suite on the first floor. She had an English footman, a private sitting-room, a Paris frock, and yet she was not married! The Miss Berwicks were

well-born but poor; their aunt could not afford them the delights of a London season. She carried them abroad, where they had never heard of Madeline's social successes. Lady Fitzsandy roved about the Continent, from one gay centre to another, and was extremely anxious to get her nieces settled—especially Lucy, who was plain and twenty-eight.

Lady Fitzsandy gladly foregathered with Mr. West's pleasant party. They always joined forces after dinner in the hall, and took coffee together. And her ladyship was specially charmed with Mrs. Leach, Miss West's chaperon, who was so sweet and so handsome—she was connected, too, with her own cousins the Horse-Leaches—and seemed so pleased and interested to hear that Nina had been at school with Miss West.

"The dear girls," as she pointed out

the pair sitting side by side on a distant divan, "were going over old times three years ago, and talking so happily together." This is what they were saying, and what Mrs. Leach would have given her best ring to hear :—

"And so your father came home very wealthy, Maddie? And you live in London, and have had two seasons, and go everywhere—and know everybody?"

"Oh, I don't know about that."

"Well, of course, you have hosts of admirers."

"I don't know about that either!"

"Nonsense, I'm sure you have had hundreds. What was the name of that gentleman at school?"

"Gentleman at school—there were no gentlemen—at school."

"Now don't be silly! He was the friend of some people that used to come

to the breaking-up. He danced with you, and Miss Selina was wild. I'm sure you must remember him."

"I don't want, as you may easily imagine, to remember anything about *school*, except," picking herself up, "some of my school-fellows."

"Oh, now, let me see, I've a shocking memory for names. I think his name began with N, or was there an N in it?"

"There was *nothing* in it—will that answer as well. There is to be a big ball here to-morrow; you are just in time."

"In the hotel?"

"Yes; it will be a capital dance."

"But I know no men."

"I know any number, and I will get you partners," said Madeline, recklessly.

And Madeline kept her word, to the intense enjoyment of Miss Berwick, who, thanks to her school-fellow, had quite a

delightful plurality of cavaliers. It seemed so strange to Nina Berwick to see Madeline West, the shabby drudge whom she had pitied at school, now surrounded with every luxury and crowds of smart acquaintances, with a carriage and servants at her orders, and all the best *partis* at her feet.

She was extremely good-natured, and did her utmost to give this rather plain, dull little spinster a good time. She got up picnics and golf tournaments. She took her for long drives and pleasant expeditions.

One afternoon Miss Berwick's grandmamma and Mrs. Leach remained at home, had tea together, and talked Miss West over in her own sitting-room. Lady Fitzsandy liked Miss West, and sang her praises in a mild key; ditto Mrs. Leach, in a yet louder strain, with one occasional

piercing high note—that note a "but." "But she is wildly extravagant; but she is wonderful, considering her antecedents; but she cannot live without excitement; but she is uncertain in her friendships."

But Lady Fitzsandy was staunch, and said, "I must say that, as far as I can judge, Miss West is true to old friends. She is very much attached to Nina."

Mrs. Leach, on her own part, professed a rival attachment for Miss Berwick, gave her autographs — which she was collecting—also a box of pralines, and took her arm round the gardens once, treated her to coffee at the Casino, and there pumped her to the best of her ability.

"And so Madeline was only a pupil-teacher when you were at school, you tell me, dear?"

"Yes; I was there fourteen months, for

finishing. I was among the elders, and she had charge of the small fry; I did not come across her at classes or in school hours, but I used to meet her in passages, and in the boot-room, and sometimes we waltzed together on half holidays. I always liked Maddie."

"And you left before her?"

"Yes; I left last Christmas three years, after the breaking-up dance. I recollect Maddie played, to save the old skinflints a guinea. But the end of the evening she danced with a man several times, and Miss Selina was furious; I think he admired Madeline, and that was her reason."

"And what was his name, darling?"

"I really cannot remember. I asked Madeline about him, and she rather snubbed me; but it was something beginning with an N, I think."

Oh, what a tiresome, stupid creature! "You cannot recollect, darling?"

"No; except that there was an N in his name! I am sure of that."

"And so Madeline remained on for a year; and did you never hear *anything* more of the school after you left?"

"Yes; let me see, I did hear something, I may have dreamt it, that some one was expelled."

"Expelled!" with a slight start. "Dear me, how shocking!"

"I cannot recollect, but I am sure it was not Madeline. She was not that sort of girl; and I may have read it in a book. I get so mixed between what I have heard and what I have read about; but I am awfully absent and dreamy."

"Have you kept up a correspondence with any of your school-fellows?"

"Oh no! I hate letter-writing; and

I detested school. But I always liked Maddie West. She was so pretty to look at, so pleasant to talk to, so good-natured. And she is not a bit changed. She is a dear."

"There never was any—you never heard of *her* getting into any scrape at school, did you?"

"Oh no; what a funny idea—a scrape! Why, Maddie was as strict about the rules as the Harpies themselves!"

"And this gentleman that admired her?"

"Oh, it was only at our dances, the breakings-up; he never gave her a second thought."

So Mrs. Leech had wasted her blandishments, her time, and her money all for nothing on this half-witted, tow-headed girl. When she realized the fact, she rose rather abruptly—looking surprisingly

sour, paid at the *comptoir*, and led the way back to the promenade in somewhat gloomy silence.

The Berwicks went on to Pau a few days later, and were lost sight of once more, as is the usual way with these wandering birds of passage.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TO MEET THE SHAH-DA-SHAH.

Mr. West returned home early in the season, and inaugurated his arrival with new horses, new liveries, new footmen, and gave a series of most *recherché* dinners. He would have bidden Mr. Wynne to one of these banquets, for the old gentleman had a tenacious memory (especially for things that his daughter expressly wished he would forget), but she quietly turned the subject; and did not encourage the idea of entertaining her husband under her unsuspicious parent's roof.

"But he belongs to my club, The Foolscap. I see him there now and then, and he seems a popular chap, and to know every one. I heard Fotherham—Lord Fotherham—pressing him to spend a couple of days with them up the river, and they say his articles and writings are quite popular."

"Oh, I don't think literary people are very interesting; you have always to get up all their works, and be able to stand a stiff examination in them, if you want to invite them here. Did you see the failure of a great bank in Australia—it was among the telegrams in the *Echo* this evening?" she added artfully.

"No. Bless my soul! what bank? Where is the paper?" in great excitement. And Mr. West's mind was hurried away into another channel, and Mr. Wynne's invitation-card was not despatched.

Madeline found time to pay many stealthy visits to Harry, who was really a beautiful child, of whom even the most indifferent mother might well feel proud. He could talk and walk so nicely, and was such a pretty, endearing little fellow, that her visits, from being spasmodic and irregular, became of weekly occurrence.

Impunity had emboldened her, and every Saturday morning, when her father imagined her to be shopping, or in the Park—found her in Mrs. Holt's old-fashioned garden, walking and playing between high hollyhocks, sunflowers, and lavender bushes, with a fair-haired little boy. What would Mr. West have said had he seen his lovely daughter running round and round, and up and down the gravel path, driven by two knotted reins, and a small fierce driver, wielding a long whip with a whistle at the end of it?

Mr. and Mrs. Wynne never met, for her days, as we have seen, were Saturdays, and his were invariably Sundays.

Low fever was prevalent that sultry month of June, also typhoid and diphtheria. The latter fastened its grim clutch on little Harry. It was a case which developed rapidly. The child had been hot and heavy, and not his usual bright talkative self, when his mother saw him on Saturday. Mrs. Holt attributed this entirely to the oppressive weather, and to thunder in the air. On Sunday his father, justly alarmed, summoned the local doctor, who at once pronounced that the little patient was a victim to diphtheria.

On Monday Madeline was sent for. The child was a shade better, though still very ill. He lay in his cot and gazed at her with large distended eyes—

and gasped out "Mummy—mummy," as he held out his little hot hands.

She remained all day, for it so happened that her father was out of town; but, under any circumstances, she assured herself, she would have stayed all the same; and when she finally departed, late in the evening, the patient was sleeping, and the doctor's opinion more encouraging. He assured her that she need not alarm herself, as he walked down with her to where the fly stood waiting in the lane.

"You really need not be uneasy, my dear madam," he said impressively, "unless things take a most unexpected turn, and then, of course, we will let you know. He is a fine healthy child, and admirably nursed by yonder good woman," nodding towards the house.

"She is indeed a good woman!"

returned Madeline fervently, as her thoughts recalled Mrs. Holt's unwearying care and night and day attendance on her nursling. She even seemed to grudge her permission to feed him, or to moisten his lips.

"I'm afraid I can't come to-morrow, unless I am really needed," said Madeline plaintively. "You say there is no danger now—you are *sure?* I may rely on you to tell me?"

"Yes; there is none whatever at present."

"Because if there were, I should remain all night."

"There is no occasion, especially if you are urgently needed elsewhere," rejoined the doctor, who nevertheless thought it rather strange that this pretty, tearful, agitated young lady should not find it the most natural thing

to remain with her sick child—her only child.

Promising that she should have early news the next morning by telegraph, he handed her into the fly, and bowed her off the scene, just as another inquiring relative—equally near and equally anxious—came hurrying up to him—in fact, the child's father, who had taken the short cut from the station by the path across the fields.

"Most peculiar state of affairs," thought the doctor to himself; "there must be a screw loose somewhere. The child's parents apparently well-off, fashionable people, living apart and visiting the farm separately, and never alluding to one another. What did it mean?"

Mrs. Holt promptly set the matter before him in three words. It meant that "they had quarrelled." Mr. Wynne

remained at the farmhouse all night, sharing Mrs. Holt's vigil, and watching every turn, every movement, every breath of the little sleeper as anxiously as she did herself. In the morning there was no positive change one way or another. The pendulum of little Harry's existence seemed to have paused for a time before it made that one vital movement in the direction of either life or death.

A message was despatched to Miss West in these laconic words—"Slept pretty well; much the same." And Madeline, relieved in her mind, entered on the work of a long and toilsome day. In short, she continued the grand preparations for a ball that they were giving that evening. It was to be the ball of the season.

Invitations had been out for four weeks.

A native Indian prince, and some of the lesser Royalties had signified their intention of being present. Mr. West looked upon the festivity as the supreme occasion of his life, the summit of his ambition —fully and flawlessly attained—and he was happy. Only, of course, there is a thorn in every rose; in this rose there were two thorns. One—and a very sharp one—the disquieting rumours of financial affairs in Australia, where a great part of his huge income was invested; and the other and lesser thorn—the announcement of Lord Tony's engagement to an old acquaintance and partner, Miss Pamela Pace."

And so his dream of calling Lord Tony by his Christian name, as his son-in-law, was at an end. However, he was resolved to make the most of the delightful present, and to give an entertainment,

the fame of which should ring from one end of London to the other. He fully carried out his motto, "money no object." The floral decorations alone for hall, staircase, ballrooms, and supper-table came to the pretty penny of two thousand pounds. The favourite band of the season was, of course, in attendance. As to the supper, it was to be a banquet, the menu of which would make an epicure green with envy; and Madeline's dress was to come direct from Doucet, and had been specially designed for the occasion by Mr. West's commands.

With all these splendid preparations in view, it will be easily understood that it was with some trepidation that Madeline asked her father to postpone the ball.

She made her request very timidly, with failing heart and faltering lips—indeed, the end of her sentence died away

in the air when she beheld the terrible expression on her parent's face.

"Put off the ball!" he roared; "are you mad? You must have a shingle short. Put off the swells, after all the work I've had to get them! Put off"—he actually choked over the words—"the Shah-da-shah, when you *know* there's not another day in the season! Every night is taken. Why, what do you mean? What's your reason?" he almost screamed.

"I—I thought the intense heat—I fancied Ascot—races happening to-morrow, and I'm not feeling very—well," she faltered lamely.

"Oh, bosh! You look as fit as possible. Your reasons are no reasons. I suppose you are cut up about Tony—though why you should be is more than I can say—seeing that you refused him twice."

"On the contrary, I'm delighted at his

engagement. Pamela Pace is, as you know, a friend of mine. He promised to bring her to the dance without fail."

"And the dance comes off on Wednesday without fail."

The suggestion of its postponement had been made on Monday—after her return from the farm.

"And remember, Madeline, that I shall expect you to stir yourself—look after the decorations, have an eye to the supper-tables, and see that the men do the floors properly, and that there are no old waltzes in the programme. You will have your work cut out, and I mine. It will be the busiest day in your life—one to talk of and look back on when you are a grandmother. It's not a common event to entertain the Shah-da-shah!" As he said this he jumped up and began to

pace the room, rubbing his hands, in an ecstasy of anticipation.

On the morning of the ball Mr. West was early about, arranging, ordering, superintending, and sending telegrams.

"Here's a pile," he suddenly exclaimed at breakfast-time, indicating a heap of letters. "I got these all yesterday from people asking for invitations—invitations for themselves, cousins, aunts, and so on, from folk who wouldn't know us last season; but it's my turn now! I'll have none of them. Whatever else the ball will be, it shall be select," waving his arm with a gesture that was ludicrous in its pomposity. "By the way, that fellow Wynne—he belongs to my club, you know—and besides that, Bagge and Keepe have given him a brief in a case I'm much concerned in. You remember him, eh?"

"Yes, I remember Mr. Wynne," she answered rather stiffly.

"Well, I met him in the street yesterday morning, and asked him for to-morrow. He's a presentable-looking sort of chap," nodding rather apologetically at his daughter; "but, would you believe it, he would not come; though I told him it would be something out of the common. And fancy his reason"—pausing dramatically—the little man was still pacing the room—"you will never guess; you will be as astounded as I was. He said his child was ill."

Madeline never raised her eyes, but sat with them fixed upon a certain pattern on the carpet, not looking particularly interested, merely indifferent, white and rigid.

"He appeared quite in a fright," proceeded Mr. West, volubly, "and very

much worried and put out. He had a case on in court, and wanted to get away. I had no idea that he was a married man; had you?"

Before Mr. Wynne's wife's dry lips could frame an appropriate answer to this awkward question, a footman entered with another bundle of notes on a salver, and thus Mr. West's attention was diverted from his unhappy daughter.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"GONE OFF IN HER WHITE SHOES!"

In due time all preparations were completed for the reception of Mr. and Miss West's guests. The grand staircase was lined with palm-trees and immense tropical ferns, and lights were cunningly arranged amid the dusky foliage; a fountain of scent played at the head of this splendid and unique approach, and here stood the host and hostess side by side.

Mr. West was adorned in a plain evening suit—(would, oh! would that he might have decked himself with chains and orders!)—and a perennial smile. His

daughter was arrayed in a French gown of white satin and white chiffon, powdered with silver. Diamonds shone on her bodice, her neck, and in her hair. She required no such adjuncts to set off her appearance, but there they were! Although tired and fagged, she looked as superior to most of her lady guests—who were chiefly of average everyday prettiness—as a Eucharist lily to a single dahlia. Her colour and eyes were exceptionally bright, for she was flushed by fatigue, excitement, and anxiety.

No news was good news, she told herself. The last telegram was reassuring. There was no need to fret and worry. Half the miseries in the world are those that have never happened! So she cast doubt and care behind her as she took her place in the state quadrille and prepared to abandon herself to the occasion. No

one in their senses would suspect for a moment that the beautiful, brilliant Miss West had a care on her mind, much less that her heart was aching with suspense with regard to her sick child.

She indeed lulled her fears to sleep, and played the part of hostess to perfection—not dancing over much, as became the lady of the house, till quite late in the evening, or rather early in the morning, and having a word—the right word—and a smile for everybody.

* * * * *

The ball went off without a single drawback. The most fastidious young men avowed they had been "well done;" the most critical chaperones could detect no shortcomings in manners, partners, or refreshments. People enjoyed themselves; there was no after-supper exodus; the men and maidens found

that they were not bored, and changed their minds about "going on."

Yes, distinguished guests remained unusually late. The supper, floor, and arrangements were faultless; and Mr. West was informed by one or two important folk "that such an entertainment reminded them of the Arabian Nights for its magnificence. It was a ball of balls."

The little speculator was almost beside himself with pride and self-satisfaction. Truly those many cheques that had to be drawn were already redeemed. He must, of course, pay for his whistle; but it was a pretty whistle, and worth its price.

He unfolded his feelings to his daughter as they stood alone in the big ballroom, after the last guest had taken leave and the carriages were rapidly rolling from

the door. His sharp little eyes shone, his mouth twitched, his hand actually shook, not with champagne, but triumph.

"You did it splendidly, Maddie. If you were a duchess you could not have hit it off better! I often wonder where you get your manners and air and way of saying things. Your mother was something of the same style, too. She had real blue blood in her veins; but she was not so sparkling as you are, though very vivacious. I must say those Miss Harpers did their duty by you. Well," looking round, "it's all over. They are putting out the candles, and there's broad daylight outside. It's been a success—a triumph! I wish some of my old chums had seen it. Bless me, how they would stare! A trifle better than Colonial dances. And wouldn't they like to get hold of this in the Sydney *Bulletin*.

There's a personal paper for you! I feel a bit giddy. I expect I shall be knocked up to-morrow—I mean to-day. Don't you rise before dinner-time. There's the sun streaming in. Get away to your bed!"

Madeline had listened to this pæan of triumphant complacency without any re-remark, merely opening her mouth to yawn, and yawn, and yawn. She was very tired; and now that the stir and whirl and excitement was over, felt ready to collapse from sheer fatigue. She, therefore, readily obeyed her parent's behest, and, kissing him on his wrinkled cheek, walked off to her own room.

Josephine, half asleep, was sitting up for her, the wax candles were guttering in their sockets, the electric light was struggling at the shutters with the sun.

"Oh, mademoiselle!" said the maid,

rubbing her eyes, "I've been asleep, I do believe. I've waited to unlace your dress, though you said I need not; but I know you could never do it yourself," beginning her task at once, whilst her equally sleepy mistress stood before the mirror and slowly removed her gloves, bangles, and diamonds, and yawned at her own reflection.

"It was splendid, mademoiselle. Jamais —pas même à Paris—did I see such a fête! I saw it well from a place behind the band. What crowds, what toilettes! but mademoiselle was the most charmante of all. Ah! there is nothing like a French dressmaker—and a good figure, bien entendu. There were some costumes that were ravishing in the ladies' room. I helped. I saw them."

"It went off well, I think, Josephine, and papa is pleased; but I am glad that

it is over," said her mistress, wearily. "Mind you don't let me sleep later than twelve o'clock on any account."

"Twelve o'clock! and it is now six!" cried Josephine in a tone of horror. "Mademoiselle, you will be knocked up —you—— "

"Oh! *what* is this?" interrupted her mistress in a strange voice, snatching up a telegram that lay upon a table, its tan-coloured envelope as yet intact, and which had hitherto been concealed by a silver-backed hand-glass, as if it were of no importance.

"Oh, I forgot! I fell asleep, you see. It came for you at eleven o'clock last night, just as the company were arriving, and I could not disturb you. I hope it is of no consequence."

But, evidently, it was of great consequence, for the young lady was reading

it with a drawn, ghastly countenance, and her hand holding the message shook so much that the paper rattled as if in a breeze of wind.

And this is what she was reading with strained eyes. "Mrs. Holt to Miss West, 9.30.—Come immediately; there is a change." And this was sent eight hours ago.

"Josephine," she said, with a look that appalled the little Frenchwoman, "why did you not give me this? It is a matter of life and death. If—if," with a queer catch in her breath, "I am too late, I shall never, never, never forgive you! Here"—with a gesture of frenzy, tearing off her dress—"take away this rag and these hateful things," dragging the tiara out of her hair and flinging it passionately on the floor, "for which I have sold myself. Get me a common

gown, woman. Quick, quick! and don't stand looking like a fool!"

Josephine had indeed been looking on as if she was petrified, and asking herself if her mistress had not suddenly gone stark-staring mad? Mechanically she picked up the despised ball-dress and brought out a morning cotton, which Madeline wrested from her hands and flung over her head, saying—

"Send for a hansom—fly—fly!"

And thus exhorted and catching a spark of the other's excitement, she ran out of the room and hurriedly dispatched a heavy-eyed and amazed footman for the cab, with many lively and impressive gesticulations.

When she returned she found that Madeline had already fastened her dress, flung on a cape and the first hat she could find, and, with a purse in one hand

and her gloves in another, was actually ready. So was the hansom, for one had been found outside, still lingering and hoping for a fare. Madeline did not delay a second. She ran downstairs between the fading lights, the tropical palms, the withering flowers, which had had their one little day, and it was over. Down she fled along the red-cloth carpetings, under the gay awnings, and sprang into the vehicle.

Josephine, who hurried after her, was just in time to see her dash from the door.

"Grand ciel!" she ejaculated to two amazed men-servants, who now stood beside her, looking very limp in the bright summer morning. "Did any one ever see the like of that? She has gone away in her white satin ball-slippers."

"What's up? What's the matter?"

demanded one of her companions authoritatively. "What's the meaning of Miss West running out of the house as if she was going for a fire-engine or the police? Is she mad?"

"I can't tell you. It was something that she heard by telegram. Some one is ill. She talked of life or death; she is mad with fear of something. Oh, you should have seen her eyes! She looked, when she opened the paper, awful! I thought she would have struck me because I kept it back."

"Anyhow, whatever it is, she could not have gone before," said the first footman, with solemn importance. "But what the devil can it be?" he added, as he stroked his chin reflectively.

This was precisely the question upon which no one could throw the least glimmer of light; and, leaving the three

servants to their speculations, we follow Madeline down to the Holt. She caught an early train. She was equally lucky in getting a fly at the station (by bribing heavily) and implored the driver to gallop the whole way. She arrived at the farm at eight o'clock, and rushed up the garden and burst into the kitchen white and breathless. But she was too late. The truth came home to her with an agonizing pang. She felt as if a dagger had been thrust into her heart, for there at the table sat Mrs. Holt, her elbows resting on it, her apron thrown over her head. She was sobbing long, long gasping sobs, and looked the picture of grief.

Madeline shook as if seized with a sudden palsy as she stood in the doorway. Her lips refused to move or form a sound; her heart was beating in her very throat, and would assuredly choke

her. She could not have asked a question if her life depended on it.

Mrs. Holt, hearing steps, threw down her apron and confronted her.

"Ay, I thought it might be you!" she ejaculated in a husky voice. "Well, it's all over! . . . He died, poor darling, at daybreak, in these arms!" holding out those two hard-working extremities to their fullest extent, with a gesture that spoke volumes.

"I will not believe it; it is not true; it — it is impossible!" broke in the wretched girl. "The doctor said that there was no danger. Oh, Mrs. Holt, for God's sake, I implore you to tell me that you are only *frightening* me! You think I have not been a good mother, that I want a lesson, that — that — I will see for myself," hurrying across the kitchen and opening a well-known door.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DEATH AND SICKNESS.

Alas! what was this that she beheld, and that turned every vein in her body to ice? It was death for the first time. There before her, in the small cot, lay a little still figure, with closed eyes and folded hands, a lily between them; the bed around it—yes, it was now *it*—already strewn with white flowers, on which the morning dew still lingered. Who strews white flowers on the living? Yes, Harry was dead! There was no look of suffering now on the little brow; he seemed as if he was sleeping; his soft

fair curls fell naturally over his forehead; his long dark lashes swept his cheek. He *might* be asleep! But why was he so still? No breath, no gentle rising and falling disturb his tiny crossed hands, so lately full of life and mischief—and now!

With a low cry Madeline fell upon her knees beside the child, and laid her lips on his. How cold they were! But, no, he could not be dead! "Harry, Harry," she whispered. "Harry, I have come. Open your eyes, darling, for me, only *one* moment, and look at me, or I shall go *mad!*"

"So you have come," said a voice close to her, and starting round she saw Laurence, pale and haggard from a long vigil, and stern as an avenging angel. "It was hardly worth while now; there is nothing to need your care any longer. Poor little child! he is gone. He wanted

you; he called as long as he could articulate for his 'mummy'—his 'pretty, pretty mummy.'" Here his faltering voice broke, and he paused for a second, then continued in a sudden burst of indignation. "And whilst he was dying, his mother was dancing!" glancing as he spoke at her visible, and incriminating white satin shoes.

"I only got the telegram this morning at six o'clock," returned Madeline with awful calmness. The full reality had not come home to her yet.

"You were summoned when the child was first taken ill. Yes, I know you had a great social part to play—that you dared not be absent, that you dared not tell your father that another, the holiest, nearest, dearest of claims, appealed to you," pointing to the child. "You have sacrificed us, you have sacrificed all, to

your Moloch—money. But it is not fitting that I should reproach you here; your conscience—and surely you are not totally hardened—will tell you far sadder, sterner truths than any human lips." She stood gazing at him vacantly, holding the brass bar at the head of the bed in both hands. "It may be some poor consolation to you to know that, although your presence would have been a comfort, nothing could have saved him. From the time the change set in last evening, the doctor pronounced the case hopeless."

Madeline still stood and looked at the speaker as if she were in a trance, and he, although he spoke with a certain sort of deliberation, and as if he was addressing one whose mind found it difficult to grasp a subject, surveyed her with a pale set face, and his eyes shone like a flame.

"There is no occasion for you to

remain; I will make all arrangements. The tie between us is severed: you and I are as dead to one another as the child is to us both. We have nothing now in common but a grave." His grief and indignation left no room for pity.

Incidents which take some time to describe, are occasionally almost instantaneous in action. It was barely five minutes since Madeline had entered the farmhouse, and become aware of her loss, and now she was looking with stony eyes upon the destruction of everything that in her inmost soul she valued. Her child had wound himself into her heart. He was dead; he had died in a stranger's arms, neglected by his own mother. Laurence was also lost to her for ever!

"Have you nothing to say?" he asked at last, as she still remained silent and immovable.

She clutched the brass rail fiercely in her grasp; there was a desperate expression in her face. She looked like some guilty, undefended prisoner, standing at the bar of judgment.

"Have you no feeling, no words—nothing?"

Still she stared at him wildly—speechless. He scrutinized her sharply. Her lips were parched and open. There was acute suffering in her pallid face, and dazed, dilated eyes. And, before he had time to realize what was about to happen, she had fallen in a dead faint.

Mrs. Holt was hastily summoned, and she was laid upon Mrs. Holt's spare bed, whilst burnt feathers were applied to her nostrils; her hands were violently rubbed, and every old-fashioned remedy was exhausted. The farmer's wife could scarcely contain her resentment against

this young woman, who had not deserved to be the mother of her dead darling, especially as she took notice of the diamonds still glittering in her ears, and of her white silk stockings and satin shoes. These latter items outraged her sense of propriety even more than Madeline's absence the previous night. She lifted up one of these dainty slippers from where it had fallen on the floor, as its owner was being carried to bed, and surveyed it indignantly.

"It's danced a good lot, this 'ere shoe! Look at the sole. Look at the satin, there; it's frayed, and it was new last night, I'll be bound! It's a pretty little foot, though; but you need not fear for her, Mr. Wynne. It's not grief as ails her as much as you think. *She* never was one as had much *feeling*—it's just dancing! She's been on the floor the

whole night, and she is just about done." And, tossing the miserable tell-tale shoe indignantly to one side, she added, "It's dancing—not grief!"

When Madeline recovered consciousness, she could not at first remember where she was, but gradually the dreadful truth dawned upon her mind; yet, strange to say, she never shed one single tear.

"No; not one tear, as I live by bread," Mrs. Holt reported truthfully. "Her face was as dry as a flint. Did ever any one know the like?" The worthy woman, who had wept copiously herself, and whose eyes and nose testified to the fact for days, did not know, had never yet seen "the grief too deep for tears."

Madeline went—her husband having returned to town—and locked herself into the room, and sat alone with the little

corpse. Her sorrow was stony-eyed and hard; her grief the worst of grief—the loss of a child. And it was edged with what gave it a searching and agonizing point—remorse. Oh, that she might have him back—half her life for half a day—to look in his eyes, to whisper in his ears! But those pretty brown eyes were closed for ever; that little waxen ear would never more listen to a human voice. Surely she was the most unhappy woman who ever walked the earth, for to her was denied the comfort of atonement! She had been weak, wicked, unnatural; she had been a neglectful mother to her poor little son. And now, that she was yearning to be all that a mother should, now that she would verily give her life for his, it was too late!

So long did she remain still and silent,

so long was there no sound, not even of sobs, in that darkened room, that Mrs. Holt became alarmed; and towards sundown came authoritatively to the door with loud knocks and a cup of tea.

"A fly had arrived to take her back to the station. Mr. Wynne had ordered it, and she must come out and have a cup of tea and go. She would do no good to any one by making herself ill."

And, by reason of her importunities, Mrs. Holt prevailed. The door was thrown back, and Mrs. Wynne came out with a face that—the farmer's wife subsequently described—fairly frightened her. She had to stand over her and make her drink the tea, and had all the work in the world to prevail on her and coax her to go back to town. No, she would remain; she was determined to remain.

However, Mrs. Holt had a still more

robust will, and gradually coaxed her guest into returning home for just that one night. Anyway, she must go and fetch her clothes. She would be coming for the funeral. Mr. Wynne had said something about Friday. She could return. Best go *now*.

"Yes," answered Madeline, leaning against the doorway from pure physical weakness, and speaking in a curious, husky voice. "I am going to tell my father all, and I shall return to-morrow."

And then she went reluctantly down the walk, looking back over and over again at a certain window with a drawn blind, still wearing her white shoes—Mrs. Holt's were three sizes too large for her—and, still without one single tear, she got into the fly and was driven away.

When she returned to Belgrave Square—haggard, distraught, and ghastly in

colour—she found that Mr. West had kept his room the whole day; that the house had returned to its normal condition, the palms and awnings were gone, and "dinner was laid in the library." Thus she was blandly informed by the butler as she passed upstairs, the butler being far too gentlemanly a person to even hint his amazement at her appearance by look or tone.

But Miss West did not dine in the library. She went to bed, which she never left for six long weeks. Diphtheria developed itself. The drains of 365, Belgrave Square, were unjustly blamed. Miss West had got a chill the night of the dance, and it was known in society that for many, many days the charming hostess lay between life and death.

Josephine, a romantic and imaginative Gaul, had long believed that her mistress

had a secret love affair. She drew her own inferences; she sympathized, and she commanded the household to keep silence respecting Miss West's mysterious errand. The morning after the ball, when diphtheria developed, the house was rapidly emptied. Even Josephine fled, and left her lady in the hands of trained nurses. Mr. West and a few domestics stuck to their posts, the infected quarter being rigorously isolated by means of sheets dipped in disinfectant fluid.

Few of the gay guests ventured to leave cards at the house. Diphtheria is an awful scourge, and this is the age of microbes. In old times ignorance was bliss.

Many kind inquiries and anxious messages came by letter, and not a few men questioned Mr. West at his club. His daughter was such a lovely creature, so full of vitality, she enjoyed every

moment of her life. Oh, it would be a thousand pities if she were to die!

Strange as it seemed, there was no more regular inquirer than Mr. Wynne. On the day when Madeline was at her worst, when three grave doctors consulted together in her boudoir, Mr. Wynne actually came to the house; and later he appeared to be continually in the club —which was more or less empty. The season was past. People were on the wing for the seaside or the moors; but Mr. Wynne still lingered on in town. Mr. West was constantly knocking up against him in the club hall or reading-room, and the more he saw of him the better he liked him. He was always so sympathetic somehow about Madeline, although he had scarcely known her, and took a sincere interest in hearing what the doctors said, and how they could not

understand how or where she had caught the infection. There was not a single case of diphtheria in their neighbourhood.

And his daughter's dangerous illness was not the little man's only anxiety. Part of his great fortune was also in a very dangerous condition. The panic in Australia was spreading, and though he bore a stout heart and refused to sell—indeed, it was impossible to dispose of much of his stock—yet he never knew the hour or day when he might not find himself a comparatively poor man. As soon as Madeline was better and fit to move he would go to Sydney, and look after his own affairs. Meanwhile he began to retrench; he withdrew his commission for the lease of a moor, for a diamond and emerald *parure;* he put down all his horses but two; and he placed the Belgrave mansion on the

market. The house was too large to be comfortable, and the sanitary arrangements were apparently unsafe.

As soon as the invalid was pronounced fit to move she was taken to Brighton, where, there being no risk of infection, Mr. and Miss West and suite were comfortably established in one of the best hotels, and at first the invalid made tolerable progress towards recovery. By the 1st of September she was permitted to go out in a bath-chair, or even to take a short drive daily. All who saw her agreed that her illness had told upon her most terribly. Her colour had departed, her eyes and cheeks were hollow; her beauty was indeed a faded flower—a thing of the past!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHITE FLOWERS.

As soon as practicable Madeline stole a visit to Mrs. Holt, Mr. West having much business of importance in London.

"I have been ill," she gasped as she tottered into the familiar kitchen, "or I would have come back long ago."

"So you have, I declare. Dear heart alive! and aged by years, and just skin and bone. Sit down, sit down," dragging forward a chair and feeling for the keys, with a view to a glass of wine for Mrs. Wynne, who looked like fainting.

"No, no. Never mind; I can't stay.

But tell me where it is, Mrs. Holt—where have they buried him?"

"No, no. Now sit you down," enforcing her request with her hand. "Mr. Wynne was thinking of burying him with his own people in Kent; but it was too far away, so he is laid in Monks Norton, with a lovely stone over him. I've been there," and then she proceeded to give the unhappy mother a minute description of the funeral, the coffin with silver plates, and a full account of the last resting-place, keeping all the while an angry and incredulous eye on her visitor's coloured dress.

"You are not in black, I see," looking at her own new black merino with some complacency.

"No, Mrs. Holt; I—I never thought of it, if you will believe me. My head was full of other things and my heart too

sore; but I will wear mourning outwardly, as I wear it in my soul, and—heart—to the end of my days."

"Well, I do wonder as you never thought of a bit of black," sniffed the other, incredulously. "'Tis mostly the first thing!"

"Sometimes, I suppose," responded her visitor wearily. "And now, Mrs. Holt, I must go; I know that you think badly of me, and I deserve it."

"Well, ma'am, I can't say but I *do!*" Her tone was of an intensity that conveyed a far greater degree of disapproval than mere words could convey. "But my opinion ain't of no value to the likes of *you*."

"You were very good to him. You took my place; I will not thank you. You do not want my thanks. You did all for his own sake and for pure love.

Oh, Mrs. Holt, if I could only live the last two years over again!"

"There's nothing like beginning a new leaf, ma'am. You have Mr. Wynne still."

"Mr. Wynne will never forgive me—never. He said so. He said——" Then her voice failed. "Good-bye, Mrs. Holt."

"Ay, I'm coming to the gate with you. I'll tell Tom Holler where to take ye; it's in or about three miles. You'd like a few white flowers? The lilies are just a wonder for beauty."

"No, no, no. I won't trouble you. I won't take them," she protested tremulously.

"Oh, but indeed you must!" Mrs. Holt was determined that, as far as lay in *her* power, Mrs. Wynne should respect *les convenances*, and, seizing a knife as

they passed through the kitchen, cut quite a sheaf of white lilies, whilst Madeline stood apathetically beside her, as if she was a girl in a dream.

Monks Norton was an old, a very old grey country church, thickly surrounded by gravestones—a picturesque place on the side of a hill, far away from any habitation, save the clerk's cottage and a pretty old rectory house smothered in ivy.

As Madeline pushed open the heavy lych gate, she was aware that she was not the only visitor to the churchyard. On a walk some little way off stood two smartly dressed girls, whom she knew—London acquaintances—and an elderly gentleman, with a High Church waistcoat, apparently the rector.

They had their backs turned towards her, and were talking in a very animated manner. They paused for a second as

they noticed a tall lady turn slowly down a pathway, as if she was looking for something—for a grave, of course. Then resumed their discussion, just where they had left it off.

"It's *too* sweet!" said one of the girls rapturously, "quite a beautiful idea, and you say put up recently?"

"Yes," assented the rector, who took a personal pride in all the nice new tombstones, "only last Saturday week. It's quite a work of art, is it not?"

"Yes," returned the second lady. "You say that it was a child, brought by the father, and that he was very much cut up. His name was Wynne—one of *the* Wynnes. It can't be our Mr. Wynne, Laura; he is not married."

"Oh, there are dozens of Wynnes," replied her sister. "And you said it was a sad little funeral, did you not, Uncle

Fred? "Only the father and a friend and two country-people. The mother——"

At this moment the girl was aware of some one coming behind her—a tall person, who could look over her shoulder—some one whose approach had not been noticed on the grass; and, turning quickly, she found herself face to face with—of all people in the world!—Miss West, who was carrying an immense bunch of freshly cut lilies. She gave a little exclamation of surprise as she put out her hand, saying—

"Miss West, I'm so charmed to see you. I heard you had been so ill. I hope you are better?"

"Yes, I have been ill," returned the other languidly, wishing most fervently that these gay Miss Dancers would go away and leave her alone with her dead.

They were standing before the very

grave she was in search of—a white, upright marble cross, on the foot of which was written in gilt letters—

HARRY WYNNE,
DIED [here followed the date],
AGED 2 YEARS AND 7 MONTHS.
"Is it well with the child? It is well!" (2 Kings iv. 26).

"We have just been admiring this pretty tombstone, Miss West—so uncommon and so appropriate. I have never seen that text before, have you?"

Madeline turned away her eyes, and with wonderful self-command said, "No, she never had."

"I wonder what Wynnes he belonged to. It does not say. The head of the Wynnes is very poor. The old estate of Rivals Wynne has passed out of the family. I saw it last summer. It is a lovely old place—about two miles from Aunt Jessie's — delightful for picnics.

Such woods! But the house is almost a ruin. The old chapel and banqueting-hall and ladies' gallery are roofless. It's a pity when these old families go down, is it not, and die out?"

"Yes, a pity," she answered mechanically.

There was, after this, a rather long silence. Miss West was not disposed to converse. Oh, why could they not go away? and her time was so precious! Perhaps they divined something of her thoughts; for the sisters looked at one another—a look that mutually expressed amazement at finding the gay Miss West among the tombs of a lonely rural churchyard; and one of them said—

"Is it not delightful to get into the country? I suppose you are staying in the neighbourhood for the yeomanry ball?"

Madeline made no reply. Possibly her illness had affected her hearing.

"This old church is considered quite the local sight. Our uncle is the rector. If you have come to look for any particular grave, we know the whole churchyard, and can help you to find it with pleasure."

This was one of the remarks that Miss Laura Dancer subsequently wished she had not made.

Miss West murmured her thanks, and shook her head. And the girls, seeing that she evidently wished to be by herself —and, after begging her with one breath to "come and have tea at the rectory" —pranced down to the lych gate on their high-heeled shoes, followed more leisurely by the rector.

And at last Madeline was alone. But how could she kneel on the turf and press

her lips to the cold marble and drop her bitter tears over her lost darling with other eyes upon her? How could she tell that the windows in yonder rectory did not overlook every corner and every grave? She laid the lilies on the turf, and stood at the foot of the new little mound for half an hour, kissed the name upon the cross, gathered a few blades of grass, and then went away.

The Miss Dancers, who had a fair share of their mother Eve's curiosity, had been vainly laying their heads together to discover what had brought Miss West to Monk's Norton church; and over the tea-table they had been telling their aunt and uncle what a very important personage Miss West was in the eyes of society—how wealthy, how run after, how beautiful, and what a catch she would be for some young man if she

could be caught! But she was so difficult to please. She was so cold; she froze her admirers if they ever got further than asking for dances.

"All heiresses are said to be handsome, no matter what their looks. She is no beauty, poor thing! She looks as if she is dying. How can any one admire lantern jaws, sunken eyes, and a pale face? Give me round rosy cheeks." And the rector glanced significantly at his two nieces, who were not slow to accept the compliment.

"Oh, aunty, she is shockingly changed since I saw her last," said Laura. "She really *was* pretty; every one said so—even other women. She had an immense reputation as a beauty; and when she came into a ballroom nobody else was looked at."

"Well, my lasses," said the rector,

rising and brushing the crumbs of cake from his knees, "the world's idea of beauty must have altered *very* much since I was a young man; or else your friend has altered greatly. Believe *me*, she would not be looked at *now*."

So saying, he went off to his study, presumably to write his Sunday sermon—perhaps to read the newspaper.

His nieces put on their hats again, and went out and had a game of tennis. Tennis between sisters is a little slow; and after a time Laura said—

"Look here, Dolly, supposing we go up to the churchyard and see where she has left those flowers. There would be no harm in that, would there?"

Her sister warmly agreed to the suggestion, and the two set forth on their quest with eager alacrity.

They discovered the object of their

walk without any difficulty; for the lovely white lilies were quite a prominent object on the green turf.

Miss West had laid them upon the new grave—the child's grave. How strange!

CHAPTER XL.

A FORLORN HOPE.

The hurried expedition to the Holt Farm, and subsequent visit to Monk's Norton, had not agreed with Miss West. She had a most mysterious relapse, inexplicable alike to her father and her medical adviser.

The former had left her comparatively better, ere starting for a long day in London. Little did he guess that the invalid had followed him by the next train, had given Josephine a holiday, had travelled into Hampshire, and gone through more mental and bodily stress

than would exhaust a woman in robust health, had returned but an hour before him in a prostrate condition—and had subsequently kept her room for days.

"I cannot account for it," the doctor said. "Great physical debility. But, besides this, there is some *mental* trouble."

"Impossible!" rejoined Mr. West, emphatically.

"At any rate she must be roused, or I cannot answer for the consequences. She has no wish to get well. She won't take the trouble to live. I think, if you could manage to get her on board ship, a sea voyage might have a good effect."

Yes, that would be the very thing, and fall in with Mr. West's plans. A trip to Australia.

"How about a trip out to Sydney?"

"Yes; and the sooner you can get her off the better. Her illness is more mental than physical. She will perhaps recover amid totally strange surroundings, and where there is nothing to recall whatever is preying on her mind."

"Preying on—stuff and nonsense—preying on a goose's mind!" cried Mr. West, irascibly.

"I dare say whatever preyed upon a goose's mind would have a scanty meal," said the physician rather stiffly.

"But she has never had a care in her life!"

"Umph!" rejoined the other doubtfully. "*No* love affairs?"

"Not one."

"Well, I won't conceal from you that she is in a most critical state. Take her abroad at once; you have given up your town house, you tell me; you have no

anchor, no ties. You should start immediately, and be sure you humour her, and coax her into the trip, for it is only right to tell you that it's just touch and go!"

This was terrible news to Mr. West. His daughter had lost her looks, her spirits, her health; was he to lose her altogether? He broke the news of a sea voyage to her rather timidly that same evening. She listened to his eager schemes, his glowing word-paintings, his prophecy of a jolly good time, with a dull vacant eye, and totally indifferent air.

"Yes, if he wished — whatever he pleased," she assented languidly. It was all the same, she reflected, *where* she died, on land or sea. But to one item she dissented—she objected to the proffered company of Mrs. Leach.

"This was just a sick girl's whim!"

said Mr. West to himself, and he would not argue out the matter at present; but he was secretly resolved that the charming widow should be one of the party. She had written him such heart-broken letters about Madeline from Scarborough (but she had not seen Madeline since her illness had been pronounced infectious). There was no fear *now*, and the doctor had said that a cheerful lady companion, whom the invalid liked, and who would share her cabin and look after her and cheer her, was essential. Who so suitable as Mrs. Leach? He would pay her return passage and all expenses; and when Madeline had retired, he sat down and penned an eager letter to her to that effect.

In two days Mrs. Leach was at Brighton, with a quantity of luggage—boxes, bags—and in a fascinating cloak

and hat, had rushed into the hand-shake of her dear Mr. West. She was looking remarkably brilliant. Oh, what a contrast to his poor emaciated child, who increased her forlorn appearance by wearing a black dress! She did not give Mrs. Leach a particularly cordial reception.

"She does not care to see *any one*," explained Mr. West apologetically, when he and his enchantress sat *vis-à-vis* over dessert. "She takes no interest in *anything* on earth—it's mental, the doctors say," touching his forehead. "She has had not only diphtheria, but some sort of shock. She sits moping and weeping all day; she never opens a book, never opens her lips; she never listens to half that is said to her; she won't eat, she can't sleep, and she insists on wearing black. I can't understand it."

But Mrs. Leach could; she saw it all.

Whoever the man was in the background of Madeline's life, he was dead. Either that, or he had deceived her, and, as a result, she was almost crazy with grief. And what a wreck!

Mrs. Leach took everything firmly in her grasp at once; she was unusually active and busy. They were to sail in ten days, and there was Madeline's outfit; but here no interference was permitted. Madeline selected her own wardrobe—a few black gowns. However, on the other hand, Mrs. Leach looked well after Madeline's correspondence; all letters were brought first to her. She did not wish Mr. West's sharp eyes to notice the swarms of bills which pursued her, and she passed all his and his daughter's letters in review ere they were laid upon the breakfast or afternoon tea-table. Madeline never appeared until the

afternoon, and exhibited no interest in the daily post; she was, however, pleased to see Lady Rachel and her brother, who came down from town, ere their departure to Scotland, expressly to wish her a *bon voyage* and a speedy return. They were really quite affected when they beheld what was neither more nor less than the spectre of Madeline West—the gay and radiant girl of last season!

They had brought her books, flowers, her favourite Fuller's sweets, many scraps of news, and, under the influence of their infectious spirits, she cheered up temporarily. Mrs. Leach, however, despite the coldness of Lady Rachel and surliness of Lord Tony, remained of the company, acting as a sort of female warder; and there was no really free intercourse. In spite of broad hints, she stuck most pertinaciously to her seat and her silk sock,

throwing in observations every now and then. Certainly she *was* thick-skinned.

At last Lady Rachel said boldly—

"Now, Madeline, take me to your room, my dear."

Madeline rose with an effort.

"Oh, my dearest, you must not go into the draught on any account! I'll take Lady Rachel to mine."

"No, thank you, Mrs. Leach; I rather wish to have Miss West to myself for a little, and I dare say she can wrap up if the draughts are so much keener *now* than at any other time of the day," and Lady Rachel carried her point.

"I wanted to speak to you alone, Maddie," she said as she closed the door, "and that odious, thick-skinned, alligator of a woman never gave me a chance! She knows that I loathe her, and might put you on your guard."

"I am on my guard. I know her, I think, even better than you do."

"And you don't like her?"

"No, I don't *trust* her."

"I should hope not. She is a regular sort of society adventuress; a notorious evil-speaker, liar, and slanderer; always poking into secrets, and levying genteel blackmail. I had *such* an account of her from Mrs. Berthon lately. I never liked her—never; but I was not up to all her history. Her father was a coal merchant, and a man of very low origin—she is a nobody. Major Leach was caught; he thought she had a quantity of money. That is always her bait—display, dress, diamonds. His family no longer speak to her, though she quotes them on all occasions, and gives them as reference to hotels and banks, and lets them in. She owes my dressmaker six hundred pounds,

and she has put her off with the excuse that she is going to marry an immensely rich man!"

"Really! who can it be?" indifferently.

"Can't you *guess*, you dear blind bat?"

"Not my father?"

"Well, I hope *not*. You must rouse yourself and interfere; elderly men are so easily made fools of. Is it true that she is going with you to Sydney, or is it just a piece of gossip?"

"Yes, it is quite true."

"Then you must stop it; you really *must*, unless you wish to have her as a stepmother. She will be engaged before you are at Gib. I think I can see her in smart board-ship frocks, very pleasant, very helpless; your father, an idle man, waiting on her assiduously, and carrying her wraps and books; you below, *hors de*

combat. Oh, she will not lose her opportunity, and she sticks at *nothing*."

"I'm afraid I can't stop her!"

"I tell you you must. I wish I was going with you instead."

"Oh, how I wish you were!"

"But I can't; my plans are cut and dried by Mr. J. I shall write to you often, dear, and expect to see you back in six months, or at least twelve, looking quite yourself; now, promise me."

Madeline, whose spirits were running down and a reaction setting in, made no answer, save tears.

Lady Rachel's warning sank into fruitful soil. Madeline plucked up sufficient energy to urge her father to relieve her of her incubus.

"I should much prefer being alone; I should indeed."

"Pooh, pooh, my dear!" recalling her

doctor's advice, and thinking what an agreeable shipmate he was providing, not only for Madeline, but himself. "Nonsense; it's all settled, passages booked. No change possible."

"I shall be far happier without her."

"Oh, rubbish! You are just weak now, and fanciful. Mrs. Leach is devoted to you."

"I doubt it; and, father, let me tell you a secret. I don't like her. I am sure she is not sincere. She is not straight."

"Come, come; she is as sincere as most women. I wonder who has been putting these notions into your head—Lady Rachel, eh? Mrs. Leach gave me a hint. Lady Rachel is all very well, and very pleasant; but a bit rapid, you know."

"Whatever she does is open and aboveboard," protested Madeline warmly.

"I'm not so sure of *that*, my dear. Mrs. Leach knows a few things that would never stand the light, and her ladyship is aware of this, and that's why she hates our good friend, and wants to set you against her."

Madeline, weak and miserable, could not argue. She was powerless against the attractive widow. She, poor hollow-eyed wreck, was no fitting opponent for the fascinating Flora, whose battery of beauty and smiles was most effective, and had captivated Madeline's susceptible parent. Her influence was far more powerful than Madeline's, on the question of what was for the benefit of the invalid, and the invalid saw that it was useless to prolong the secret struggle, and succumbed to her fate.

Laurence Wynne had not come across Mr. West for a considerable time; but he

knew that the Wests were at Brighton, and that Miss West was almost convalescent. It was the end of October, London was filling, and he was lunching at his club, with one or two acquaintances at the same table, when one of them said—

"Hullo! there's old West. I must go and have a word with him presently. He looks rather down; not half as smart and perky as last year."

"He has lost a good deal of money!" observed the other.

"Yes; but not as much as is supposed. He is an uncommonly shrewd old boy, and knows when to save himself; but he can't save himself from his present trouble. He is going to lose his daughter?"

"His what?" put in Wynne, quickly.

"Daughter. Surely you've heard of the lovely Miss West? She was the rage

for two seasons. She got diphtheria in the summer, and—— "

"Yes, yes; I know," impatiently.

"Well, he took her down to Brighton, and she had a bad relapse of some kind. I was there on Saturday last, and I saw her. Her carriage had stopped at a shop I was coming out of. I give you my honour I had to look at her three times before I was sure of her; she has lost every particle of colour and flesh and beauty. She might be thirty-five, and gives one the idea of a person who had seen a ghost, and never got over it. Yes"—in answer to the expression of his listeners' eyes—"it's rather awful. She used to be so pretty; now she has death in her face."

"Are you in earnest, Ruscombe?"

"Why, of course I am. Old West is in a deadly funk, and taking her off to

Australia, as a sort of forlorn hope. But he will never get her there alive."

"Who says so?" he asked sharply.

"I thought you did not know her, man! The doctor who attends her happens to be my brother-in-law; and, of course, we are all interested in the *beauty*. He has a very poor opinion—— Oh, are you off? The fellow is mad. He hasn't touched a morsel. What the dickens!—Oh, ho! Now, what does *that* mean—he is button-holing the old squatter himself?"

"No, Wynne, not seen you for ages," Mr. West was saying. "I never come to the club. No spirits for anything. My daughter is ill—got a sort of relapse. The doctors say that she has some trouble on her mind—must have had a shock. Extraordinary case! She has never had a care in her life!"

Mr. Wynne made no answer, and looked down.

"She can't get up any strength, and—and takes no notice of anything, does not want to recover, and is just fading away!"

"Ah, that's bad! I suppose you have the best advice that is possible?"

What a nice, kind fellow Wynne was! When one was in trouble he quite took it to heart too; he appeared—or was it the bad light—actually grave and anxious.

"I'm taking her to Sydney, to try the effect of the sea and change; it's just a chance—a last chance."

"And when do you start?" he asked, taking out his handkerchief and wiping his brow.

"The day after to-morrow, in the *Victoria*. We go from Tilbury Docks; as she couldn't stand the journey across,

and, in fact, the more sea the better. A lady friend is very kindly coming as her companion, just for the trip; but Madeline and I will not return to England for a year or two. I'll see how her native climate will suit her."

"Yes; I hope sincerely that it will," said Wynne. There was an atmosphere of sympathy in his vicinity that had the effect of compelling confidences.

"I think the London racketing knocked her up, and I'm never going to have a town house again. When I come back, I shall buy some ancient historical mansion, the seat of some old family that have died out, and restore it. That is, of course, if Madeline——" He left his listener to fill in the sentence.

"Yes," rather absently.

"I dare say you'll be married and settled by the time I see you again."

"I am not likely to marry," he returned quietly.

"Oh yes, yes; I forgot—a widower, eh? And how's the child? I always forgot to ask?"

"The child is dead," he answered gravely.

"Dear me, that's a pity; children are a terrible anxiety, as *I* know! Well, I hope to come across you again, Wynne."

"I think it very likely that we shall meet again, and very shortly, for I am going out to Australia myself, almost immediately."

"No! Oh, I'm delighted to hear it! Law business, of course, with an immense fee, eh?"

"On most important business, at any rate. And now I'll say good-bye for the present, for I have a great deal to do before I start."

"And I've been jawing away about my family affairs and taking up your precious time! I'm awfully sorry. I say, I wish you could manage to come out with us in the *Victoria*. Could you?"

"I'll do my best." And he hurried off to wire to Fenchurch Street to secure a berth.

CHAPTER XLI.

"LAURENCE!"

THE *Victoria* was a crowded ship. There was a large contingent of Australian passengers, also many Anglo-Indians who changed at Aden, and a number of society swallows who were bound for Italy and Egypt. Madeline and Mrs. Leach shared a four-berthed cabin, and enjoyed the luxury of two spare berths, which served as holdalls for their belongings. Mrs. Leach had innumerable parcels, bags, boxes, books, a jewel-case, a tea-basket. She busied herself ere starting, in fixing up her affairs, and annexed fully three-

quarters of the available space. Madeline was tired, and put on a tea-gown and lay in her berth languidly watching her partner making her toilette, arranging her hair, her dress, her rings, ere sallying forth to dinner and conquest. She looked remarkably handsome, prosperous, and triumphant as she turned to the wretched girl in the berth, and surveyed her exhaustively. She had adopted a curious way of staring at her the last few days—a gaze of polite, half-veiled insolence—that was distinctly irritating.

"Well, dear Madeline"—the steamer had left the docks, and was steadily throbbing down the Thames—"so we are off, you see, and I am of the party—no thanks to *you*. Oh, I know all about it, dearest, and I know what you would little guess."

"What?"

"Ah, no matter," with a meaning smile.

"No, I suppose it is no matter," wearily. Nothing mattered, she was so tired—oh, so tired. She wished she was dead, and she slowly closed her eyes on her companion.

Mrs. Leach gazed at her in amazement. What she knew *did* matter very much. It was all very fine for Madeline to close her eyes, and waive away a subject. She would discover that she, Flora Leach, had her in her power—she held her in the hollow of her hand. Luck—she called it—had dealt her an ace of trumps! People were settling into their places as Mrs. Leach entered, and there was the usual confusion in the saloon—incidental to starting. Mr. West had secured a capital seat, and he and Mrs. Leach dined happily together — and were generally

taken for man and wife. The dinner and wine was good, the motion almost *nil*, a mere slight shaking, and the widow enjoyed herself vastly. Madeline was rather tired, she said; Josephine was looking after her. A little soup was all she would take. Should she tell him *now?* No, the situation was too public, he would probably shout and make a scene. She would wait for a day or two, until they had their two deck chairs comfortably drawn up side by side, under the lee of a cabin, and when the dusk had come and the stars were out, she would whisper into his ear his daughter's secret.

When Mrs. Leach retired to her cabin that night, Madeline was asleep. How pale and wan her face, how thin her hands, she might be dead—she wished she were. Then she took her bag out of the bottom berth—she occupied a top

one by preference—and searching in its pockets, got out a letter-case, extracted a letter, and sat down to read it. It was pleasant reading, to judge by her expression, and she went over it no less than twice. The motion of the steamer was not so agreeable; in fact, it was becoming more remarkable every moment. The things on hooks were getting lively and beginning to swing. She crushed the note hastily into its envelope, thrust it into her bag and began to undress as quickly as possible.

The next morning they were off Dover and the *Victoria* was rolling considerably. Mrs. Leach was wretchedly squeamish. She attempted to rise, she dressed with less than her usual elaboration, and staggered out into the saloon. Alas! she was too bold; the smell of fried fish was her undoing, and routed her with great

slaughter. She lay in her berth all day, and all the next day. Also Madeline; but she was not a prey to Neptune—only so tired—so tired of life, and everything.

Late in the afternoon, a bustling, talkative stewardess came in and, willy-nilly, got her up, helped her to dress, put a long cloak about her, and assisted her upon deck about dusk.

"The air will do you good, miss. You are no more sea-sick than I am. If you stop in that stuffy cabin, you'll be real bad, and the gentleman said as I was to fetch you, if you could stand. There's a nice long chair, and cushions and rug, all waiting for you in a sheltered place."

And in this chair she soon found herself, whilst her father fussed round and wrapped her up. The weather was certainly boisterous, the waves broke

over occasionally with a long and vicious swish; but the air was strong and invigorating, and the pallid girl leant back and drank it eagerly.

"There are a whole lot of people on board you know, Maddie," said Mr. West, sinking into a seat beside her.

"Are there? I am sorry to hear it," she answered querulously.

"Oh, I say; come, come! and all so anxious to see you again."

"See me again!" with a weary little laugh, "they won't *know* me when they do see me."

"There is Lady Stiff-Staff going out to Bombay with her daughters, and Captain Vansittart, and Miss De Ville, who was at school with you."

"Oh, I can't *bear* her!" was the petulant reply.

He was about to add, "and Mr. Wynne,"

but she could not bear him either, nor dare he mention that it was Mr. Wynne who had urged him to get Miss West on deck, at all costs, if she was not sea-sick; Mr. Wynne who had helped to find a stray corner, and brought up cushions and rugs (Mr. Wynne who had secretly tipped the stewardess a sovereign). He was a nice, warm-hearted fellow. He was glad he was on board (Wynne was a whist player), he liked him. A pity Maddie had such a prejudice against him.

Mr. West talked on, asked for poor Mrs. Leach. "Josephine, I hear, is dead," he remarked, "or *says* she's dead. It's a mercy you are a good sailor. This bit of a breeze is nothing. Wait till you see how it blows off the Lewin! And I dare say, once we are round Finisterre, it will be a mill-pond. Now I'm dying

to smoke, and as I know you can't stand it, I'll go for a bit. Shall I ask Lady De la Crême to come and sit here in my place, and amuse you—eh?"

"Oh no—no. I don't want any one, I'm going down soon."

She remained for some time in a half-dreamy state, watching the sea, the flying wrack of clouds, the somewhat faint and timid young moon, which occasionally peeped forth. Her eyes had become accustomed to the dim light, when she was rather surprised, and annoyed, to see a tall man approach and coolly seat himself in her father's chair—which was drawn up alongside, and almost touching hers. Presently he spoke.

"Madeline," he whispered, leaning towards her.

"Laurence! Not Laurence?" she exclaimed faintly.

"Yes—I hope you are better?"

"No." A long pause, and then, in a dead dull tone, she added, "I hope I am going to die."

"What is the matter with you?"

"They call it by some long Latin name; but you and I know what it is."

"Your father is still in the dark?"

"Yes, it is scarcely worth while to tell him *now*; no need to worry him for nothing. When I am dead you will forgive me, Laurence, and—and think less hardly of me?"

"You are not dead, or going to die, and I prefer to forgive you when you are alive."

"And will you—but no, you won't — you cannot — why should you? I don't expect it," she said in hurried gasps. "What can I do now to atone?"

"Get better, get quite well, and I will forgive you *everything*."

She laughed, a queer little hollow laugh, and then said—

"How strange that you should be on board. Are you going to Egypt?"

"No—to Sydney."

"Why? Have you friends there, or business?"

"Both; urgent affairs, and I expect to meet friends. Your father says he is delighted that I am a fellow-passenger. He likes me."

"How—how extraordinary!"

"Yes; you do not flatter me. But at least it is fortunate—— Well, now, you will have to go down. It is getting rather chilly."

"Oh no, no; I like being here. And the cabin is stuffy, and Mrs. Leach is so—so—such a wretched sailor."

"Then, I am truly sorry for you. But you really must go. I'll guarantee to take you below quite safely."

"No, no. Papa will——"

"It's as much as he can do to keep his legs, much less steer another. But, if you prefer it, I'll call the stewardess."

"No; never mind"—rising and staggering, and putting a mere skeleton hand on his; and, as he supported her tremulous steps, he realized how fearfully weak she was.

They got downstairs safely, and, as she paused, breathless, for a moment under the great electric light, they looked into one another's faces for the first time since that June morning.

It was all that Wynne could do to repress an exclamation of horror, as a white, hollow-cheeked spectre raised her sunken, hopeless-looking eyes to his.

Even the doctor's brother-in-law had not prepared him for *this*.

"Stewardess," he said, as soon as he could control his voice, "take great care of this lady. Make her eat. Get her some supper at once—some hot soup and a glass of Burgundy. You must have something to eat before you turn in."

"Oh no; I could not," she protested feebly. "I don't want anything."

"Oh yes you do; and you will be sure to come up early to-morrow. I'll come and fetch you about eleven o'clock, weather permitting." And he walked off, and went on deck to a distant part of the ship, and leant over the bulwarks alone.

His old feeling for Madeline had come to life. That wasted form, those tragic eyes had touched him—cut him to the heart. Yes; she looked as if she was about to

follow the child. If she had been to blame, he himself was not guiltless. He had upbraided her too bitterly; he had left her to bear her grief alone; he had not made sufficient allowance for her youth, her natural craving for the pleasures and delights of girls of her age. The domestic yoke had been laid upon her childish shoulders, and what a cruel weight it had proved! Why should he have been astonished that she should be glad to slip her neck from under it for a year or two! She had no girlhood. She was endowed with a gay, happy, sun-loving temperament. He should not have left the telling of their secret in her hands; he should have spoken to Mr. West himself. He would do so now, within the next few days. If Madeline was going to die, she should leave the world as *Mrs. Wynne!* But,

whether she was to live or die, she should have his incessant care.

Day by day Madeline appeared on deck, and day by day gained some steady but scarcely perceptible improvement. Mr. Wynne took much of her father's attendance off his hands, and left him free to smoke and gossip and play whist. He arranged her pillows and rugs in her chair; saw that it was sheltered; talked to her when she was inclined to talk; told her everything that was likely to amuse her; brought up, or caused to appear at frequent intervals, soup, grapes, champagne, tea, arrowroot, and used all his persuasions to induce her to partake of them. He had an unlimited supply of magazines, books, and picture-papers, which he read to her when she was disposed to listen; and, when she had looked them over, occasionally she fell

asleep; and he sat beside her, contemplating her white and death-like appearance with a countenance to match.

However, every sleep, every smile, was an inch on the road to recovery. Mr. West was extremely obliged to him for his kind attentions to his daughter. He himself was very fond of Madeline, and, naturally most anxious about his only child. But he confessed that he did not understand sick people, and was no hand at nursing. He felt doubly grateful to Wynne for his assiduity, and the politeness and interest with which he listened to his own discourse.

He talked to Wynne confidentially—chiefly about finance. He had lost some money lately—a good deal more than he liked. But he never put his eggs into one basket, and had a fair amount in sound English securities.

Wynne was a steady—well—friend. Mr. West had recently experienced (and resented) a certain palpable change in the social temperature. He was no longer flattered, deferred to—or even *listened* to —as formerly. He was credited with the loss of most of his fortune—every one knew he had shares in the "Tom and Jerry" Bank—and his daughter with the loss of her beauty.

"The Wests didn't amount to much now," to quote an American lady. This conviction made Mr. West extremely wroth. People thought he was played-out. Whoever was particularly civil to him *now* he took to his heart, and kept there.

One evening Laurence made his way into the smoke-room, and stood looking on at the termination of a rather hard-fought rubber. His father-in-law was playing. He was, moreover, holding good

cards, and in a state of high jubilation. His partner was Lord de la Crême. Could this trim, rather jaunty little man, holding the cards he was about to deal, and laughing a loud, rather forced laugh at one of his lordship's good things—*i.e.* a very middling joke—be a terrible domestic autocrat? Who would believe it? But Laurence looked below the surface. That quick, fiery little eye, now beaming so brightly, told a tale that he could read. It spoke of choler, obstinacy, of restless ambition, self-seeking, and fury. Madeline, doubtless, knew the capabilities of that eye, and feared it.

When the whist party had dissolved, and people were gone to their berths, Mr. West—who was always prepared to sit up—and Wynne were alone.

"I suppose Madeline went below long

ago? You have been looking after her as usual?"

"Yes, I took her down."

"That's all right"—pausing. "Then play a game of *écarté*. There's another half-hour yet before lights-out."

"No, thanks. The fact is"—seating himself opposite, and squaring his arms on the table—"I want to have a few words with you."

"With *me?* Certainly, certainly"—with a momentary glance of surprise. "About those investments?"

"No; it's a more personal matter. You"—hesitating for a second—"have seemed to like me, Mr. West."

"Seemed! Why, I don't know a single young fellow that I like as well. You are clever, you are good company, you are making yourself a name. I only wish I had a son like you!"

CHAPTER XLII.

WON ALREADY.

"THEN, what would you think of taking me for a son-in-law?" said Mr. Wynne, fixing his dark eyes steadily on the little man opposite to him, who was busily shuffling the cards.

"Eh!" was his only reply for quite a long time—an "eh!" incredulous, indignant, and yet not wholly combative—a long, sonorous exclamation. "Personally I like you, Wynne—could not like you better; but"—and he paused—"Madeline is my only child; she is remarkably handsome—*was*, I should say

for the present—and created quite a sensation in town. You are a very good fellow, and a gentleman, but don't be offended if I confess that I am looking higher for her. I expect the man she marries to place a coronet on her head, and you must admit that she will grace it!"

Laurence Wynne said nothing, merely nodded his assent, and his companion—who loved the sound of his own voice—resumed volubly.

"Besides, Wynne, you are a widower! And she does not like you; it's all very well when she is ill and helpless, and tolerates you; it's truest kindness to tell you—and, indeed, you must see it *yourself!* You have no idea the iceberg she can be. I often wonder who she is waiting for, or what she expects?"

"Look here, Mr. West, I can quite understand your views. Mad—I mean

Miss West—would, of course, grace a coronet, as you say, but let me tell you that we Wynnes, of Rivals Wynne, have bluer blood in our veins than any of the mushroom titles of the last two hundred years. You will see, if you look in Burke, that we were at home before the Normans came over. We were Saxons, and still a power in the land. Our family title is extinct; but it only wants money to restore it. I have relations who—like some relations—turned away their faces when I was poor; but were I to become rich and successful, they would receive me with open arms, and introduce my wife and myself to circles as exclusive and as far beyond the stray third-rate noble paupers who prey on your—your good-nature and—pardon me—your ignorance as the moon is above the earth. I speak plainly."

"You do, sir, and with a vengeance!" said Mr. West, a little overawed by the other's imperious manner, for Mr. Wynne had said to himself, why should he be timid before this man, who at most was a *bourgeois*, whose father—best not seek to inquire into his history—whose forefathers had gone to their graves unwept, unhonoured, and unsung, whilst he, Laurence Wynne, though he boasted of no unearned increment, was descended from men who were princes at the time of the Heptarchy!

"You value good birth, I see, Mr. West," holding out his hand as if to convey the fact that he had scored a point. "And you value success. I am succeeding, and I shall succeed. I feel it. I know it—if my health is spared. I have brains, a ready tongue, an indomitable will; I shall go into Parliament; think

what a vast field of possibilities that opens out! Which of your other would-be sons-in-law aims at political life? Look at Levanter, the reputation he would bring you." Laurence shuddered as he spoke. "Do not all honest men shun him? What decent club would own him? Look at Montycute, what has he to offer, but his ugly person, his title, and his debts? He and others like him propose to barter their wretched names and, as they would pretend, the *entrée* to society—not for your daughter's personal attractions, of which they think but little, but her fortune, of which they think a great deal!"

"Young man, young man!" gasped Mr. West, inarticulately, "you speak boldly—far too boldly."

"I speak the sacred truth, and nothing but the truth," said Wynne, impetuously.

"I offer myself, my talents, my career, my ancient lineage, and unblemished name for your daughter. As to her fortune, I do not want it; I am now an independent man. Give me your answer, sir—yes or no."

Many possibilities floated through Mr. West's brain as he sat for some moments in silence revolving this offer. Levanter and Montycute were all that this impetuous young fellow had described. He had good blood in his veins; he was handsome, clever, rising, whilst they were like leeches, ready to live upon him, and giving nothing in exchange but their barren names. This man's career was already talked of; he could vouch for one success, which had agreeably affected his own pocket, and, with the proverbial gratitude, he looked in the same direction for favours to come. He

had an eloquent tongue, a ready pen, and a fiery manner that carried all before it. He would go into the House, he would (oh! castle-building Mr. West) be one of the great men—Chancellor of the Exchequer — some day. He shut his eyes — he saw it all. He saw his son-in-law addressing the House, and every ear within its walls hanging on his words. He saw himself, a distinguished visitor, and Madeline among the peeresses.

Laurence Wynne, keen and acute, was convinced that some grand idea was working in his companion's mind, and struck while the iron was hot.

"May I hope for your consent, sir?" he asked quickly.

"Well, yes, you may, if you can win her. You are welcome, as far as I am concerned. Yes!" holding out his

rather short, stubby hand, with one big diamond blazing on his little finger. "It's time she was settled, and I'm afraid she will never be what she was, as regards her looks. I did hanker after a ready-made title, but one can't have everything! I like you. You are tolerant of an old man's whims; you don't laugh at me under my own roof, and think I don't see it like some young cubs; you are a gentleman, and I give you Maddie and welcome, now that I have talked it over; but the hitch, you will find, will be the girl herself. She is, as you may see, utterly broken down and altered, and in no mind to listen to a love-tale; but, well or ill, I must tell you honestly that I would not give much for your chance."

"What would you say, sir," said Laurence, now becoming a shade paler,

"if I were to tell you that I had won her *already?*"

Mr. West looked at him sharply.

"The deuce you have! And when?"

"More than three years ago."

"What! before I came home? when she was at Harpers'? Were *you* the half-starved fellow that I heard was hanging about? Oh, never!"

"I don't think I was half-starved, but I was most desperately in love with her."

"Oh, so it's an old affair?"

"Yes, an old affair, as you say, Mr. West. And you have given me Madeline if I can win her, have you not?—that is a promise?"

"Yes," rather impatiently. "I never go back on a promise."

"Well, now," leaning forward and resting his head on his hand, and speaking more deliberately, "I am going to

tell you something that I am certain will surprise, and I fear will incense you; but you will hear me out to the end. We have been married for more than three years!" He paused — not unnaturally nervous—awaiting the result of this tardy announcement.

"Why! what—what—what the devil do you mean?" stammered Mr. West, his little eyes nearly starting from their sockets. "What do you mean, sir? I—I don't believe you, so there!—don't believe a word of it!" breathing hard.

"If you will only listen to me patiently, you *will* believe me. I am going to tell you many things that you ought to have been made acquainted with long ago."

Mr. West opened his mouth. No sound came. He was speechless. And his son-in-law proceeded very steadily. "Four years ago you were said to be

bankrupt, if not dead. Mrs. Harper gave you no law when your bills were not paid. You have never heard that Madeline, from being the show-pupil and favourite, sank to be the shabby school drudge—half-fed, half-clothed, and not paid for the work of two governesses. This went on for a whole year. I saw her at a breaking-up affair, when she played all night for her schoolfellows to dance. I fell in love with her then. Miss Selina hated us both, and, to satisfy her hate and malice, managed—one night in the holidays—to leave us both behind at Riverside, late for the last train. We had all been to the theatre. The affair was planned. We waited where we were desired to wait, and lost the train. Next morning I called to explain to Miss Harper; but Madeline's character was gone—she was turned out, dismissed without mercy.

She had no friends, no salary, no reference. I had, at least, bread-and-cheese —so I took her to London and married her."

He stopped and looked at Mr. West, who was livid, and who cried out in a loud, strange voice—

"Go on, sir—go on—and get it over, before I go mad!"

"I was poor. We lived in lodgings; but we were very happy. After a time poverty and sickness knocked at our door. I had typhoid fever. It was an unhealthy season, and I nearly died. I have sometimes since thought that it would have been well if I *had* died, and thus cut the Gordian knot, and released Madeline. However, I hung on, a miserable, expensive, useless invalid. In the middle of all this a child was born."

Mr. West started out of his chair; but subsequently resumed it.

"It was a boy——"

"A boy! Where is it?" demanded his listener, fiercely.

"You shall hear presently," said his son-in-law, gravely. "Madeline was the kindest of wives, nurses, mothers."

"Madeline—*my* Madeline?" said her father, in a tone of querulous incredulity and shrill irritation.

"We had no money—none. I had kept aloof from many acquaintances since I married, and my relations dropped me with one consent. We pawned all we had, save the clothes on our backs. We were almost starving. In those days Madeline was a model of courage, cheerfulness, endurance, and devotion. When I recall those days, I can forgive her much."

"Forgive her! Madeline pawning clothes! Madeline starving!" cried her father, so loudly that a sleepy cabin-steward looked in.

Mr. Wynne signed to him to go away, and continued, "Ay, she was. We could barely keep the wolf out. Then came your letter to the Harpers, and they advertised for Madeline. She saw the message, and pawned her wedding-ring to go to them. And they, never dreaming that she was married, received her with rapture as Miss West. She had no tell-tale ring, and Mrs. Harper heard that she had been in a shop in London, in the mantle department. In an evil moment Madeline saw your letter wherein you spoke very strongly against a poor love affair, and possible marriage. So, in desperation, and to get money and bread for her child and for me, she deceived

you. Later on, when the influence of wealth and power and luxury ate their way into her soul, she still deceived you—and forgot us. I must speak the truth."

Mr. West nodded.

"She put off the dreaded day of telling you all, and I was out of patience. She would not allow me to break the news. You remember one evening that I called in Belgrave Square, and we went to look at a picture together? It was then that I made my last appeal."

"She gave you up, then?" he asked abruptly.

"She did."

"And the child?" eagerly. "My grandson, my heir!"

"You remember the great ball you gave last June?"

"Of course—of course," irritably. "It will not be forgotten in a hurry."

"He died that night," said Mr. Wynne, slowly.

"Eh! what did you say? Nonsense!"

"He died of diphtheria. Madeline came too late to see him alive. It was from the child she caught the infection. Yes, I believe she kissed him. He was a lovely boy—with such a bright little face and fair hair. We kept him at a Hampshire farmhouse. Many a time I told Madeline that the very sight of him would soften you towards us; but she would not listen. She made promises and broke them. She feared you too much."

"Feared *me!*"

"Since his death, I have had nothing to say to her; but I heard that she was very ill in London; and I used to find how she was going on from various people,

including yourself, as you may remember. I thought my heart was steeled against her, but I find it is not. I am ready to make friends. I heard accidentally that she was in a most critical state—that day I saw you at the club—and I threw up all my briefs and business and took a passage."

"And so *she* is your business in Sydney?"

"She—she is most woefully changed. When I first saw her under the lamp, I—I—I—cannot tell you——" He paused, and drew in a long, slow breath, which said much.

"Poor girl! No wonder she looks as if she had seen great troubles. I wonder she is alive. Well, I'll not add to them! She treated me badly; but she has treated you worse. And afraid of me! Why, every one knows that my bark is worse

than my bite—in fact, I have no bite. And you stuck to her when she had no friends! Oh what a treacherous old serpent was that Harper — harridan. Steady payment for nine years. And to treat my daughter so! And I actually gave that sour old maid a present for her *kindness* to Maddie. They did not know you were married to her?"

"No; scarcely any one know."

"And what's to be done! How is it to be declared, this marriage. How is the world to be told that Madeline has been humbugging them for the last two years as Miss West?"

"The wedding can easily be put in the paper as having taken place in London, with no date. It will only be a nine-days wonder. We can send it from the first place we touch at."

"Ah, you are a clever fellow, Wynne.

Hallo! the lights are going out, and we shall be in darkness."

"But you are no longer in darkness respecting me."

"Well, I feel in a regular fog. And so you're my son-in-law!"

"Yes; there is no doubt about that."

"It's odd that I always cottoned to you."

"You will not be harsh with Madeline, will you?"

"Do you take me for a Choctaw Indian, sir? I'll say nothing at present. Board ship is no place for scenes. She's very shaky still, though better."

"Yes, I think she is a shade better now she is on deck all day."

"It was an awful pity about the little boy, Wynne, and——"

Here the electric light suddenly went out, and Mr. West had to grope his way

as best he could to his own cabin. He lay awake for hours, listening to the seas washing against the side of his berth, thinking—thinking of what he had been told that night, thinking of Madeline and Wynne in a new light, and thinking most of all of the little fair-haired grandchild that he had never seen.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HEARTS ARE TRUMPS.

The night of the conversation in the smoking-room, when Mr. West scrambled below in the dark—not knowing, as he subsequently explained it, whether he stood on his head or his heels—was the occasion of a curious incident in Miss West's cabin. Each day as she grew stronger and better, recovering energy and appetite, Mrs. Leach became worse, and the weather to correspond. She sustained existence on Brand's essence and champagne, and counted the hours until they were in the Mediterranean—

not that even the tideless sea can be reckoned on in October. Mrs. Leach felt miserably ill, peevish, and envious; and when Madeline came down to go to bed, she asked her to get her a bottle out of her dressing-bag—"something to make her sleep."

"Shall I hand the bag up to you?"

"No, no, it's open. A long, greenish bottle—in the pocket next the blotter."

Yes, the bag was not locked; the contents were in great confusion—combs, pins, handkerchiefs, note-paper. It was not so easy to discover the little green bottle. In turning out the loose articles, Madeline came upon a letter addressed, in Mrs. Kane's scrawl, to "Miss West, care of Mrs. Harper, Streambridge," forwarded to Belgrave Square, and from Belgrave Square to Brighton. Some one had kindly saved her the trouble of

opening it, presumably the lady in the top berth and the owner of the bag.

"Well, have you not found it yet? Dear me, how slow you are!" she exclaimed fretfully.

"Oh yes. I've found it."

"Then do be quick. I feel as if I should *die* from this nausea and weakness."

Fortunately the little bottle turned up at this instant, and Madeline (having closed the bag and secured her letter) handed it up to Mrs. Leach, who next demanded "eau de Cologne, a handkerchief, another shawl, a tumbler, and some hairpins."

It was some time before she was at rest behind her curtains. The positions were reversed, and Madeline, the invalid on land, was not the invalid at sea. At last she sat down to read her letter. She had had no communication with Mrs.

Kane since she had been at Harperton, from whence she had sent her a ten-pound note. Luckily for her, Mrs. Kane never saw the society papers, and had no idea that her late lodger had blossomed out into a society beauty, much less that she lived in London, otherwise undoubtedly she would have had the pleasure (?) of a visit from her correspondent. The letter said:—

"2, Solferino Place.

"DEAR MADAM,

"I hope, in remembrance of *old times*, you will excuse my writing; but I am very hard set just at present, and would feel obliged if you could spare me a small matter of twenty pounds, Kane being out of employment since Easter Monday. I hope Mr. Wynne and your dear baby are well. The baby must

be a fine big fellow by this time—two last winter—and a *great amusement.* Has your pa ever found out the trick as you played — how, when he thought you was snug at school, you were a whole year living in London in this house?

"I hope you won't disappoint me regarding the money, as having your *own* interests to consider as well as I have *mine.*

"Yours affectionately,

"Eliza Kane."

The postmark on the envelope was dated two days before they had left Brighton. And this was what Mrs. Leach meant by her hints and looks. This stolen letter was to be her trump card.

The next morning, when Madeline left her cabin, she was met by Laurence. He was, as usual, waiting, hanging about the

passage and companion-ladder. At last a tall, slight figure in black appeared, a figure that walked with a firmer and more active step, and that no longer crawled listlessly from cabin to deck. It was Madeline, with a faint colour in her face, she accosted him eagerly.

"Oh, Laurence!" she began, "I have something to tell you. Come into the music-room; it is sure to be empty."

And then, in a few hurried sentences, she unfolded her discovery and placed Mrs. Kane's nice little letter in his hands.

"Of course, now I shall speak. Of course, I seem a miserably mean, cowardly creature! It is only when forced by circumstances that I open my lips at last. Mrs. Leach has long guessed that I had a secret and a *past*—but, strive as she would, she could never find out anything definite."

"This is very definite," said Laurence, dryly.

"It is, indeed. I could not understand her intense scorn for me latterly. Laurence, I meant to have told my father immediately after—after last June, but I was ill; and then, as I used to lie thinking, thinking, I said to myself, I may as well carry the secret to the grave, for now the child is gone, and Laurence is gone, what is the use of speaking?"

"But you see that Laurence is not gone!" he exclaimed expressively; "and we will let bygones be bygones instead. I am before both you and Mrs. Leach. I told your father last night. He took it, on the whole, surprisingly well! I have not seen him this morning, though. He won't allude to it at present. Board ship is no place for scenes, he says; and I am entirely of his opinion; so, my dear,

you need not look so ghastly. Now, come along on deck. We shall soon sight Tarifa. Ah! here is Mr. West at last."

The music-room was pretty full as the little man came slowly towards the pair, who sat apart on a couch at the end of it. He looked unusually solemn, and he had discarded his ordinary blue bird's-eye tie for a black one. He avoided his daughter's glance, and fixed his attention on her mourning-gown, as he said—

"Well, how are you to-day, Madeline, my love?"

"I feel better—much better."

"That is good news! Then come on deck and see the Spanish coast?"

He sat next to her — their steamer chairs placed closely side by side—in silence for a long time, smoking, and apparently buried in thought; then, as he suddenly noticed Wynne's signet-ring

on her wedding finger, he leant forward, took her fragile hand in his—it trembled, for he held it long and contemplated it intently—and at last released it with surprising gentleness.

"Madeline," he said, "I *know* you've had enough trouble. I'm not going to say one word; but I'm greatly cut up about what happened—last summer;" and Madeline drew her veil over her face to hide her streaming tears.

After they had crossed the notorious Gulf of Lyons, Mrs. Leach appeared, with languid airs, expecting attention, solicitude, and sympathy. Alas! for expectations. What a change was here! Mr. West was entirely engrossed with Madeline, and was positively curt and gruff (he had heard the history of the letter in the bag); and when at last she found

an opportunity of talking to him privately, and began with little preamble about "dear Maddie—such a marvellous sailor—so *much* better—getting away from some dreadful hold on her—and influence—seems to have transformed her into a new creature!" Mr. West looked at the speaker keenly. The sea-breeze is searching, and the southern sun pitiless. Ten days' sickness had transformed Mrs. Leach into an *old* creature! She was fifty-five or more, with her sunken cheeks, and all those hard lines about her mouth and eyes. What did they signify?

"Do I see Mr. Wynne on board?" she asked, with a tragic air—"over by the boats? How strange, how audacious!"

"Do you think so? He is Madeline's husband, and a great friend of mine."

Mrs. Leach gasped! The wind had been taken out of her sails.

"Then *you* know all about it?"

"Yes, I know all about it," said Mr. West collectedly.

"You have not known it for long—not when we sailed?"

"No, not quite as long as *you* have, Mrs. Leach"—looking at her expressively.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, for one thing, that I obtained my information through a legitimate channel; that, as you are such a victim to the sea, it will be only humane to land you at Naples. It would be *cruel* to take you on to Melbourne; and Madeline has a companion entirely to her taste in Laurence Wynne."

"And oh what a tale for London!" she exclaimed with a ghastly sneer. "I am feeling the motion a good deal—perhaps you will be kind enough to assist me to get below? I find I must lie down."

To tell the truth, she had been completely bowled over—thanks to a strong breeze and a strong opponent.

Mrs. Leach landed at Naples and enjoyed an exceedingly pleasant winter in Rome—due to a handsome cheque which she had received from Mr. West, nominally as a return for her kind interest in his daughter, and really as a golden padlock for her lips.

Mr. West, once in Sydney, contrived to pull a good many chestnuts out of the fire, and returned to England as wealthy as ever, purchased the old estate of the Wynnes, and restored the half-ruined house in a style in keeping with its ancient name.

Madeline and her husband spend a great deal of their time at Rivals Wynne, though their headquarters are in London, and some day the old home

will descend to the old race. The children are beautiful; another little Harry is the picture of the one that is lost, but not forgotten, as fresh white wreaths upon a certain grave can testify. Mr. Clay, the rector, has seen Mrs. Wynne placing them there with her own hands. She made no secret of it *now*.

"It is the grave," she explained, "of our eldest little boy. I will bring his brother and sister here by-and-by."

The rector, when he takes strangers round the churchyard, and points out the most noticeable tombstones, halts for a good while before a certain marble cross, and relates the story of a mysterious young couple who visited the grave separately, but who now come together, with other children in their train.

Mr. Laurence Wynne continues to "rise." He is in Parliament, and a man

of such note that Mr. West no longer casts a thought on Madeline's lost coronet. Lord Montycute has married a rich widow twenty years older than himself. Lord Tony is happily settled, and Lady Tony and Madeline are fast friends. Lady Rachel is little Madeline's godmother. She is a pretty child, sufficiently spoiled by her father, but ruined by her doting grandpapa. She is an imperious little person, but obedient and docile with her mother. It is only poor grandpapa whose miserably scanty locks she puts into curl papers, whom she drives about in a pair of long red reins, and whom she rules with a rod of iron.

THE END.

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